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# Young Klondike

## STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, March 15, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

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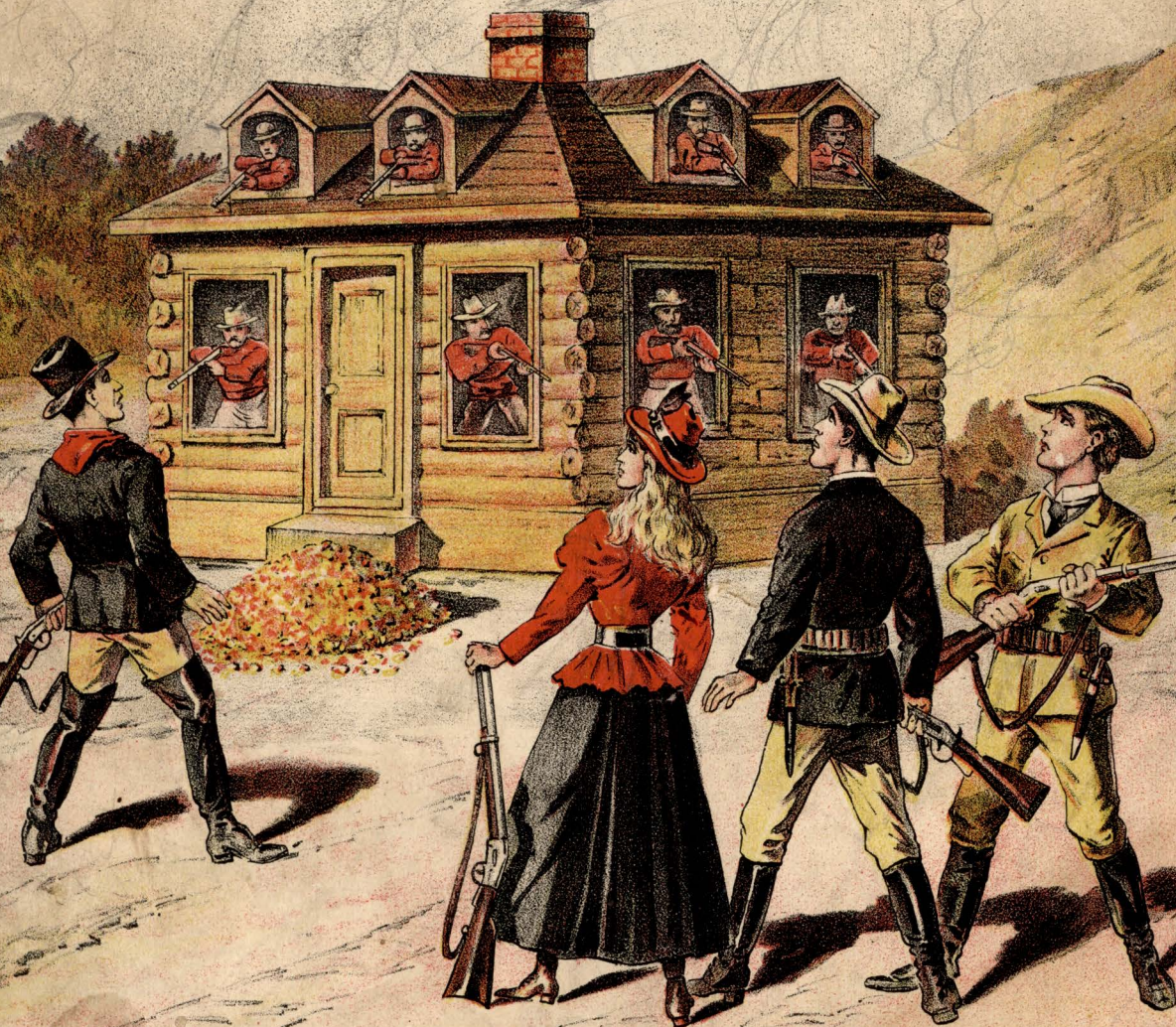
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# YOUNG KLONDIKE'S LOST MILLION;

—OR—

## THE MINE WRECKERS OF GOLD CREEK.

BY AUTHOR OF "YOUNG KLONDIKE."



At the same instant every window of the hut was darkened. There were eight windows visible; at every one of the eight appeared a man wearing a red shirt and a slouch hat, and eight rifles were thrust out, covering Young Klondike and his friends.

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## Young Klondike's Lost Million;

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### CHAPTER I.

#### NED GOLDEN'S SECRET.

DAWSON CITY is a lively place at night at all times of year, but with a big difference, according to what time you take it.

In the winter, when it is almost all night and there is almost no day, and the thermometer stands anywhere from zero to fifty below, the streets of this now famous mining town are deserted, and the life is all in doors.

Big saloons in frame shanties are running full blast, big gambling rooms ditto, but on the street there is no one out for pleasure, and those who show themselves for business make the best time possible, darting out of one shelter and making a quick rush for another, all muffled up to the eyes.

In summer the life moves out on the streets to a great extent, the doors of the saloons and gambling dens are wide open, and the rough, red-shirted miner and the newly arrived Klondiker, with his store clothes, soon to be discarded, are to be seen talking "mine" and "big strike" and "new diggings" on all sides.

One evening in the month of July a young man came hurrying out of the Victoria Hotel, and passing through the groups of idlers which hung about the piazza and on the street, made his way rapidly toward the levee, where a steamer from Seattle had just come in loaded down with Klondikers to that extent that it was a wonder she did not sink in the Yukon.

As he passed among the crowd on the levee the young man was greeted on all sides.

It was, "good-evening, Mr. Luckey," here, and "fine evening, Mr. Luckey," there.

Everyone seemed to know him, and one of the newcomers who had been among the first to land, turned

to a grizzled miner who stood smoking a pipe and studying the passengers as they came down the gang-plank, and asked who the young man was.

"Why, he's one of our biggest mine owners," was the answer. "That's Dick Luckey of the great firm of Golden & Luckey. Of course you've heard of them?"

"Well, no, I can't say I have," replied the tenderfoot, as the new-comers on the Klondike are sometimes called.

"Hain't heard of Golden & Luckey? Gee whiz! Whar you been all this last year? Thought everybody in the States had heard of them," was the drawling reply.

"Well, then, here's one who hasn't. Who are they and what are they?"

"Biggest claim owners on the Klondike, that's what. They own claims all over, and are worth three millions at least."

"So?" said the tenderfoot; "and ain't they just got the right sort of names, too?"

"That's what they have! Ned Golden, he's the senior, but we call him Young Klondike. He used to be a poor clerk in New York and came out here without a dollar—look where he is now."

"Right you are, if he's worth what you say, that's great. Who's the young fellow you just spoke to? The partner?"

"That's what! Dick Luckey was a poor New York clerk, too, but he's a big bug in Dawson now, and don't you forget it; then, besides them two there's Mr. Zed, he's with 'em, and Miss Edith Welton, a lady what Young Klondike rescued from the wreck of a steamer on the voyage to Juneau. Look! There's Mr. Zed now, and Miss Welton is with him—there's three of the firm of Golden & Luckey, and let me tell

you they could buy and sell half of your beggarly money grubbers down to Frisco; yes, that's what!"

Thus saying the grizzled miner touched a match to his pipe, and the tenderfoot turned away.

Dick Luckey had already met his friends on the steamer. Soon they passed that way, and the tenderfoot saw a very pretty girl and a short, thick-set man, wearing a rusty "plug" hat and high cavalry boots, walk toward the Victoria Hotel in company with the junior partner of the Klondike's richest firm.

"Where did you leave Ned?" asked Dick, as they walked along.

"We didn't leave, he left us," replied the little man. "We've got to go right back, Dick, and you must go with us. We'd better take the launch and start now."

"Well, everything is all ready if you want to go," said Dick. "I have attended to that."

"I knew you would," added Edith. "If we had been sure that you were at Dawson, we'd have sent you word instead of coming, but you see we weren't, and the Unknown thought it would be safest to come."

"And Ned?"

"Went off up the creek. We signaled the steamer and they took us on board and here we are."

"And as sure as my name isn't Snooks, Ned has struck something rich," laughed the little man, whom Edith had alluded to by the singular name of the Unknown.

Concerning which name a word of explanation, and then we launch right out into our story and don't turn aside again.

The little man was a sort of silent partner in the firm of Golden & Luckey and they called him the Unknown, because for some unexplained reason he refused to tell his name.

Although Ned Golden, otherwise Young Klondike, and Dick Luckey had been associated with him ever since they came to the gold diggings, they had not the faintest idea who he really was.

All they actually knew was that the Unknown posed as a detective, and claimed to have traveled the world over in search of a mysterious criminal whom he called "his man."

Who this man was, or why the detective sought him, was one of the mysteries; so was his real name, for he would never tell it to a living soul.

Sometimes his partners called him Zed, and people about Dawson came to know him as Mr. Zed. Altogether he was a very curious character, this Unknown.

"It's settled, then, that we get on the move at once?" asked Dick as they walked along.

"That's what!" replied the detective.

"Decidedly!" added Edith.

"Then we'll go straight for the launch, for the sooner we start the better."

"How long will it take us to run down to Gold Creek?" asked Dick.

"Oh, we'll be there by midnight," replied the detective, "but whether we find Young Klondike there

or not is a question. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if he didn't show up till morning, but when he does come he'll be pretty sure to have something to tell."

Quick moves and prompt action—that was always the style of the firm of Golden & Luckey—and to this they rightly attributed a great deal of their success.

On this occasion they went further down the levee, and passed through a big wooden gate into a boat builder's yard, where there was a little pier projecting out into the Yukon.

To this pier a handsome naphtha launch, of unusual size, lay moored, and alongside of it was a boat loaded down with goods carefully packed under a tarpaulin.

What these goods were did not appear, but we may mention that they were mining tools of every description, a store, and great hampers of provisions, such as experience had taught these old-time Klondikers were best adapted to a new camp.

Was Golden & Luckey about to engage in a new enterprise then?

It looked very much that way.

They went aboard the launch and made themselves comfortable there.

Dick took charge of the engine and the Unknown proceeded to cast off.

There was no noise and fuss about it.

Edith and the Unknown made no more of returning over thirty miles of the Yukon than they would of going quietly to bed in the Victoria Hotel.

It was a charming night. The stars were shining and the moon would soon be up over the big mountains opposite Dawson City, mountains lying so near the metropolis of the Yukon, and yet scarcely trodden by the foot of man.

After they were well under way, Dick began to ask questions again, for be it understood that Dick had been off on a trip to the Owl Creek diggings, owned by his firm, and had not seen Young Klondike, his partner, in two weeks.

"What in the world do you suppose Ned is on to now?" he asked. "To me all this is a mystery, you know."

"And so it is to us," replied Edith. "The story is just this, Dick, we came down from El Dorado Creek, and instead of finding Ned, as we expected, found a letter waiting for us, saying that he had gone down to Gold Creek."

"Yes," broke in the Unknown, "and that letter told us to write one for you, telling you to get everything ready to start a new diggings at a moment's notice, and——"

"And I know all that," interrupted Dick. "When you saw Ned at Gold Creek what did he say to you? That's what I want to know."

"Huh!" said the detective, "then you'll have to wait, for that's just what we haven't got a chance to tell you. He wouldn't say anything at all."

"Strange."

"No, it ain't. Ned gets those mysterious fits on him once in a while."

"Catches them from you, perhaps."

"Ye gods and little fishes, no! I say no. There never was such a frank and open character as I am in the whole world."

"When you are asleep; your mouth is wide open then, but asleep or awake nothing ever comes out of it about yourself."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, that's a gross libel. I won't take it at all."

"Leave it alone then. Look here, did you see Ned?"

"Yes, we did. He met us there and told us to get right back."

"And that's all?"

"All of any consequence. Oh, I tell you Young Klondike has struck something rich, and like a sensible fellow he's keeping dark about it until it takes proper shape. Now, then, Dick, I'm going to sleep, for it wouldn't surprise me a bit if I didn't get much chance the last half of the night."

Thus saying the Unknown curled himself up in the corner of the launch and was off in the land of Nod in no time.

And the launch ran on down the Yukon, skillfully managed by Dick Luckey, the heavily loaded boat trailing behind.

And that trailing boat acted as a drag; it was after one o'clock before Dick turned into the mouth of a small creek on the left hand side of the river. Edith pointed out the place.

Here the banks were low and well overgrown with clumps of bushes.

A hundred Indians might have been lurking there, but they never would have known.

Dick woke up the detective as soon as they turned into the creek.

The Unknown leaned over the side of the boat, washed his face, shook himself, and then declared that he was ready for business.

"This is the place all right, Dick," he said, "but you've got to go further up the creek to the hut."

"That's easy done if there's water enough to float the launch."

"There's lots of it. It would take a small steamer."

"How far is the hut?"

"Oh, about a quarter of a mile. I shouldn't think it was much more."

"Shall we meet Ned there?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you. He left us and went still further up the creek. All I know is that he told us to meet him there."

"Which we'll do. Ned must have some good reason for all this."

"It's his secret and we must respect it," said Edith.

"That's what we will," replied Dick, "but what worries me is the idea of Ned being here alone. I don't like it. There may be Indians about or some gang of toughs. I really don't know what I should do if anything was to happen to Ned."

"There's the hut," exclaimed Edith. "You can see it now."

The hut stood on a projecting point of land at some little distance ahead. It was a rude affair built of logs, but had one peculiarity about it—it was all windows.

There were two on the ground floor, opening in front, and two more opening on the side toward them, besides which were three dormer windows opening off the roof, giving light to the loft over the main room.

Such a structure seemed altogether out of place in this lonely spot, and Dick was puzzled to know why it should ever have been built.

"What in thunder did they put so many windows in that hut for?" he exclaimed.

"You tell me who built it, and I'll tell you why the windows are there," replied the Unknown. "I've seen nothing like it nowhere, and that's the reason I'll never tell you why it was built the way it was."

Dick watched the hut as they approached.

"Don't see anything of Ned yet," he exclaimed. "Shall I give him a call?"

"I wouldn't," replied the detective, "you can't tell at all who may be lurking about here. I say we'd do better to keep quiet until he comes."

"I suppose it is so, but—look there! Look there!"

It is no wonder that Dick was startled and thus exclaimed.

Suddenly the lonely hut on the point was taken out of the darkness and shadow in which it stood, and brilliantly illuminated.

Lights appeared at every window—ghostly lights shining without any apparent reason.

Dick stopped the launch instantly, and they all sat there and stared.

Was this part of Ned Golden's secret?

There were the lights, but our Klondikers could see no one in the hut. It was certainly a very mysterious affair.

## CHAPTER II.

### MORE MYSTERY ABOUT THE HUT.

"THERE'S Young Klondike now!"

As the mysterious lights in the hut suddenly vanished, which they did in a moment, a young man appeared on the opposite shore of the creek.

He came out from among the bushes, rifle in hand, and stood staring attentively at the hut and the boat.

"Hello!" cried Dick. "Ned! Hey, Ned!"

"Hello, Dick!" was the reply. "By gracious, what's going on over there in the hut?"

It was easy to ask the question, but, of course, Dick had no means of answering it.

The launch was nearer the place where Ned Golden

stood than it was to the hut by a good deal. Dick drove it over against the shore, and Ned sprang aboard.

"It's very mysterious," he said. "When I left that hut there was nobody in it. Who can be there now?"

"Don't ask me," replied Dick. "Of course I know nothing about it."

"Of course not if you've just arrived."

"That's what we have."

"When did you leave Dawson?"

Dick named the time, and Young Klondike declared that they had made a good run."

"Well, I think so," said the Unknown. "We haven't lost a minute. Here we are, bag and baggage, and all ready to follow our leader to the North Pole if necessary, but by the Jumping Jeremiah, I must know what's the cause of our being treated to a display of fireworks like that!"

"Give it up. It's all a mystery to me," replied Ned.

"It's nothing to do with your secret then?" asked Edith.

"Nothing at all. I haven't been at the hut since you left."

"Where have you been?" asked the Unknown.

"What's your name, old man?" demanded Ned, suddenly turning on the detective.

"Tom Collins," replied the Unknown, gravely.

All laughed, and the conversation dropped.

Dick and Edith understood that Young Klondike was not ready to talk out freely.

Having the utmost confidence in his shrewdness, they were willing to wait until he was.

In the next breath Ned explained his motive.

"Look here, Zed, I've made up my mind to one thing," he declared.

"What's that?" asked the Unknown.

"You've got to tell your name."

"Who says so?"

"I say so. Here we've known you for more than a year and if you were to die to-morrow I should not know what name to put on your coffin plate."

"That's right as it stands, but I should tell my name before I kicked the bucket, dear boy."

"The deuce you would! You might be shot, or drowned or hung or any other old thing—then what would we do?"

"I'll take a day off and decide."

"Don't trouble yourself. We are going to force your hand—or at least, I am."

"And how?"

"Shan't let you into this deal till you tell."

"Oh, very well! Then I'll stay out."

"You'll miss it if you do. It's the biggest one yet. I'm going to make a million this time."

"Hooray for our side!"

"But it won't be your side unless you tell your name. I'm going to bar you right out."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we'll see about that! I'm coming in."

"I have spoken!" cried Ned, with a theatrical wave of his hand.

It was all a joke, and the detective knew it.

Fact was, Ned Golden had no other motive for keeping his movements secret than to treat all his friends to a surprise.

"I don't understand about this light business in the hut at all," he said, suddenly changing the subject. "Hadn't we better get over and see what it's all about?"

"That's what we ought to do," replied the detective. "One thing is certain, the hut was deserted when we left it this afternoon."

"And I don't see a sign of any one over there now," said Dick, "and I've been watching close, too."

"We'll go over and have a look," declared Ned; "drive ahead, Dick. This mystery must be explained."

Dick started the launch going and they landed on the opposite bank of the creek.

They were close to the hut now and lost no time in going up to it.

Dick lighted a lantern and they went in and examined the hut in every part, finding no one there, and what was more, discovering no possible explanation of the mysterious light.

"Well, it beats me!" cried Ned. "I can't understand it at all."

"I think," said Edith, rather nervously, "that we'd better stay in the launch until daylight. I don't like the idea of sleeping in the hut."

No one disputed this; in fact, it seemed a better plan all around, and it was carried out.

Of course it was Dick's turn to sleep, and Ned declared that he had been up all the night before and wanted his sleep, too, so the Unknown, who was now perfectly fresh, remained on the watch.

Ned, Dick and Edith slept until long after daylight. In fact, it was six o'clock before they were up.

The Unknown was sitting quietly on the bank, reading an old San Francisco paper, with his rifle by his side.

He declared that there had been no alarm all night—that absolutely nothing had occurred.

"And that makes it all the more mysterious," replied Young Klondike. "We can't do anything until we know what it means. Let's go up again and have a look at the old shebang by daylight. By gracious, what's that? How came it here?"

They had walked up the bank and were close upon the hut now.

No wonder Ned was startled, for there right before the door of the hut, lay a pile of golden nuggets as big as a bushel basket.

Nothing of the kind had been there when they left the hut to go back to the launch.

"Nuggets! By the Jumping Jeremiah, nuggets!" cried the Unknown.

"That's what!" exclaimed Ned, "but how in thunder did they come here?"

"More mystery," said Edith.

"I don't object to gold," added Dick, "but I must say I don't relish seeing it dumped down at our feet in this sort of fashion. It don't suit me for a cent."

They stood for a moment staring at the gold, and scarcely knowing whether to advance or retreat.

"There's a string to every nugget, I'll bet," said the Unknown at last. "All the same I'm going to find out if they are real."

He stepped forward and stooped down to pick one up, when all at once a thunderous voice sang out from inside the hut:

"Drop it! Drop it! Don't you touch that gold!"

At the same instant every window of the hut was darkened.

There were eight windows visible; at every one of the eight appeared a man wearing a red shirt and a slouch hat, and eight rifles were thrust out covering Young Klondike and his friends.

"Move on out of this, Young Klondike!" shouted one of the men—which one they could not tell. "Move on right now and make yourself scarce, or we'll drop all four of you in your tracks!"

Ned started to answer, but before he could say two words every rifle was discharged.

Of course they could not have been aimed at our Klondikers for there was no damage done, but it sent them hurrying down the hill to the launch.

"Move on up the creek! We can't fight that gang!" gasped the Unknown. "This is the time for disappearing; we'll come back and do them up later on."

Dick started the launch going, and up the creek they went flying.

As they rounded the point and looked back at the hut again, they saw that the red shirted figures had disappeared from the windows.

The hut was as silent and deserted to all appearance as it had been when they first came in sight of it the night before.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DOWN IN THE OLD CRATER.

WHEN one thinks of Alaska being a volcanic country, it always seems as though there must be some mistake.

Nevertheless it is no such very long time ago, since there were active volcanoes in Alaska. Some say there are still, although others deny it, which being the case, we won't undertake to say which is true.

But it is entirely certain that the mountain in which Gold Creek has its rise was once a volcano.

On its side—the side down which the creek comes tumbling, we mean, is a great mass of old lava thrown about in every direction. It had originally spread itself in one vast sheet at the foot of the rise and the creek wore its way through it.

Very desolate it looked all about the old lava beds,

and the Unknown made some wise remarks to that effect when the launch began to move through it, for there had been no stopping after they were driven away from the hut.

"We've got to go away up to the head of the creek, and we may as well go now as any time," was what Young Klondike said, adding: "Drive her ahead, Dick! Whoever those fellows are, they've got possession of the hut, and I mean to let them hold it, but if they come bothering about up here, that will be quite another thing."

It was a run of nearly two miles up to the head waters of the creek, and half a mile more brought them to the base of the mountain, which rose to a height of some two thousand feet above them, barren and grim, without a tree of vegetation on its frowning side, for the lava did not offer a chance even to fir trees to take root; it certainly was a poor place to tie up, but when one is out gold digging, one does not pay the least attention to this sort of thing, and no one was surprised when Ned announced that this was the place where he intended to make his camp.

"Hello!" cried the Unknown, "we've got to the end of our journey, have we? By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'd like to know how you expect to build a house here on this infernal black rock."

"You're dead wrong all around," laughed Ned. "In the first place it ain't rock, it's lava; in the next I don't intend to build a house, I mean to put up a tent. I suppose you brought the tents along with you, Dick?"

"That's what I did," replied Dick; "they are in the boat with the rest of the things."

"Then let's get them out right away and make ourselves comfortable before we begin to talk."

The boats were then made fast to the rocks at the foot of the rise, and the unpacking of the big hamper under the tarpaulin began, everyone keeping a sharp lookout for the toughs.

The mining tools were taken out and laid in a convenient hollow in the lava; then came the small hampers of provisions and other things, and last of all an oblong box containing two tents, neatly folded up in small compass, one large and the other small, and both of the very best pattern that money could buy.

It took but a short time to put them in position and get up the little stove which came along, too, so that a fire could be built at any time they might have fuel to kindle it with, which certainly was not the case yet, for there was not a stick of wood as big as your thumb to be seen anywhere around.

"I think we may as well have some breakfast before we begin discussing our prospects," remarked Young Klondike. "Now then, what do the rest of you say?"

"I say yes, most decidedly," replied Dick. "I don't know how you feel, Ned, but I am as hungry as a wolf."

"If you ask me how I feel," broke in the detective, "I shall tell you that I'm that hungry that I'd even undertake to cook the breakfast if we had any wood to

cook with, and that's saying a good deal, for, as you are all very well aware I don't like cooking for a cent."

"I'll take you up and give Edith a rest on the cooking," said Ned; "there's wood enough, plenty of it."

"And where?"

"Within fifty feet of where you are standing at the present moment."

"Blest if I can see it, then!" said the Unknown, looking about at the barren prospect.

"Walk straight ahead and you'll see it."

"And I'll run into the mountains—that's what!"

"Do as I tell you," laughed Ned, and when the Unknown did it, he found a great pile of dry branches lying at the foot of the mountain in a deep impression in the lava.

"Wood enough to last us a week! How in thunder did it get here?" he exclaimed.

"Must have been washed down from the mountain last spring," answered Ned. "All I know is I found it there, and that's why I picked out this place for our camp."

"Which reflects equal credit on your judgment and common sense. We'll light the fire and go about getting breakfast at once."

They all loaded themselves down with the wood, and in a few moments had a good fire blazing in the little stove, but Edith would not hear to any one cooking the breakfast but herself, and a first rate one it proved to be.

"Anything the matter with telling us what we are here for now, Mr. Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown.

"Nothing at all. We are going down the mountain," replied Ned.

"Down the mountain! You mean up."

"No, I don't; I mean down."

"Down on the other side, after we get up?"

"No; not on the other side at all."

"What in thunder do you mean then?"

"You puzzle me, too," said Edith. "If it was the Unknown who made all this mystery, I shouldn't wonder, but when it comes to you, Ned, I can't see what you are driving at, for it ain't like you one bit."

Young Klondike laughed.

"Oh, it is only a little fun," he said. "I am preparing a surprise for you—that's all."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, you have surprised us already," said the detective. "Here you go, suddenly running away down the Yukon into the unheard of region where nobody ever goes, and then you send for us to follow you and add mystery to mystery by sending us flying back to Dawson again after Dick, and then down here again and—ye gods and little fishes, there's no telling where you won't send us next."

"It will pay you."

"Perhaps it will; your ventures usually do pay, I'll admit that; but look at all the mystery that's been crowded on top of it. Take that affair of the hut for instance; and now you begin talking about going

down a mountain without going up. What in thunder does it all mean?"

"Let me explain," replied Ned, laughing. "I claim the right to have my little mystery as well as you, Mr. Detective, and now here it is and you will see I am no fool."

All gave Ned close attention, for they felt that the explanation which was coming was sure to mean a new golden discovery if nothing more.

"It happened one night about six weeks ago," began Ned. "I was walking up and down in front of the Victoria Hotel, in Dawson City, when a poor fellow all in rags came hobbling along, supporting himself on two sticks. I saw at a glance that the man had had his feet badly frozen and was maimed for life, but I saw something else besides that. His pinched face and trembling step showed me that the poor fellow was hungry—in fact, that he was starving. He was an old man, too, which made it all the worse.

"I went right up to him, and said:

"My friend, you are hungry. Can I help you at all?"

"I am hungry," he replied. "The fact is, young man, I am starving, but I don't believe you can help me much, for I'm suffering with a terrible disease—cancer of the stomach; if I had a million of money it would do me no good."

"Here was a sad case, and I felt for the old fellow, so I asked him why he did not try to get back to the States where he could have doctors to attend him and have proper care.

"That's what I want to do," he answered. "There's a steamer sailing for St. Michaels to-morrow, and I'd go if I only had the money, but the fact is, pard, I'm busted, I hain't got a blame cent."

"That cuts no ice," said I, "there are plenty here in Dawson who will help you, and I'm one of them. Come to the hotel to-morrow, and I'll go with you to the steamer, and see what can be done."

"The old fellow thanked me, but didn't seem quite satisfied to let it go so.

"Fact is, I may not need anybody's help," he said. "I'm looking for the gent they call Young Klondike. If I could only strike him I could get all the cash I wanted. The greatest favor you can do me is to help me find him; anyhow, you might tell me if he's in town."

"Well, well!" cried Dick. "He struck the right man that time, didn't he?"

"That's what he did," replied Ned. "I made up my mind then and there that something was coming out of it, so I told him who I was."

"What did he say?" asked Edith, who was becoming intensely interested in all this.

"Well," replied Ned, "he just stood still and looked at me.

"So you're Young Klondike?" he said. "Well, well! I've been looking for you for the last three weeks."

"For what?" I asked.

"To sell you a claim," he answered.

"Of course I told him that while I had all the claims I wanted, I was always open to new deals if I could see any money in them."

"There's a million in this," he answered. "Boss, I worked all last winter down on the mountains at the head waters of Gold Creek. I dug out all of a million, and froze myself and starved myself a-doing it, only to see the dust slip through my fingers in the end. It ain't the claim I want to see so much as it is that there lost million. You've got money, and you've got health and strength, and you can get it, but I'm all played out and never can. All I want is to go down to 'Frisco and die among my friends, for like I must, and nothing under Heaven can save me now."

"Then you took him right up-stairs into your room and listened to his story," said the Unknown. "Of course, that's what you did, Young Klondike. You don't have to tell me."

"That's it," replied Ned, "and I'll tell you honestly I never grew so excited in my life."

"Tell the story to us then and give us a chance to get excited too."

Young Klondike had just come to the most exciting part of his narrative, and all waited eagerly for what he was going to say next, but Ned seemed bent on keeping up the mystery, for he broke the thread off short by saying: "and the rest I'll tell you after we go down the mountain, unless you want to hear it bad enough to make the Unknown tell his name."

"Pshaw! That's easy settled," cried the detective. "My name is Q. Philander Snodgrass. Go right on!"

"Prove it," said Ned, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"How the mischief am I to prove it?"

"By producing a certificate of your baptism."

"Can't. I was baptized in church, and the next day the church burned down; the records were all destroyed."

"Then you don't hear the rest of the story till we go down the mountain. All I shall say is that old Jim Producers dug a million in this mountain, more or less. After he dug it he lost it suddenly. Where it went to is my mystery; how it went is part of it, too, but I can't say any more. Now, let's start."

And as no persuasion could prevail upon Ned to go further, they began to get ready for their start then and there.

Ned now explained that they had to go up the mountain before they could go down, at which the Unknown seemed greatly relieved.

"That's one mystery off the books," he said, "and we've no doubt the others will drop off in due time. What are we going to do with the boats?"

"Leave them here," said Ned; "of course, we can't carry them up the mountain with us."

"Oh, can't we, indeed," retorted the detective. "I didn't know but you'd discovered some way of running them up. Never mind; we'll make packs of our buff, shall we? Or do we leave them here?"

"We carry all we can. The rest we'll come after later."

"Suppose those fellows we saw down at the hut come after it sooner, in short, before we get back?"

"We'll have to take our chances."

"Suppose we hide boats and all in the hollow where we got the wood?" suggested Dick.

Dick's suggestion was carried out, and after that they started up the mountain, each member of the party being loaded down with all they could carry.

It was a beautiful day, cool and pleasant—just the day for such a journey, and although it was hard climbing the way did not seem long.

When they reached the top, after scrambling over the rough lava heap for the best part of an hour, they were treated to one of those amazing views which only the Klondike country could afford.

For miles and miles, as far as the eye could reach, the famous valley of the Yukon lay spread out at their feet.

Far in the distance up the valley faint columns of smoke could be seen rising. Ned declared that this was Dawson City; but even with a glass they could not make out the buildings at all.

But this was not the only smoke. Oh, no! There were great clouds of it to be seen between the mountain and Dawson in many places, and again in the other direction toward Forty Mile.

This smoke marked the different working mines, for everywhere in the Klondike country where a claim is being worked, the frost has to be extracted from the ground by means of great fires. Winter and summer it is there.

"Those must be the Cherry Creek claims on the other side of the mountain," remarked Dick.

"That's what they are," replied Ned. "There's half a dozen working mines down there, but they've got nothing at all to do with our affairs, although after we accomplish our purpose I intend to go back that way and see what the Cherry Creek mines are like."

"Good idea," said Edith. "I've heard so much about those mines, that I'm anxious to see them, and I shan't mind the extra journey one bit."

"What's the next step, Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown. "Are we to be allowed to penetrate further into your lordship's secrets or not?"

"Go on and see if you can find out the next step for yourself," replied Ned. "I'm tired; I'm going to stop here a little while and rest."

"All right. I don't object. Bet you a new hat I can penetrate your mystery," laughed the Unknown.

"I'll go with you," said Dick.

"Go it," replied Ned. "Now then, Mr. Detective, show that you are up to your business. There was a million dug on this mountain and that million vanished suddenly; see if you can find out where it came from, and where it went to. I know both, and I'm going to tell Edith while you are gone."

"Tell it then, and I'll bet you what you like I shall be able to give you points when I come back,"

chuckled the Unknown, and off he went with Dick. They pushed on over the cap of the mountain and disappeared down on the other side.

They were gone the best part of half an hour and then Dick came hurrying back alone.

"Hello!" cried Ned, "where's the Unknown?"

"Gone down the old crater, Ned. By gracious, it is risking his life. I tried my best to stop him, but he wouldn't listen. He told me to follow or go back just as I pleased, and as I didn't want to break my neck here I am."

"Pshaw!" cried Ned, "there's no danger whatever of breaking one's neck. I expected the Unknown would find the crater all right, but I didn't think he'd be fool enough to go down without coming back to ask me what I knew about the place."

"We'd all better go down after him, hadn't we?" asked Edith.

"That's what we'll do," said Ned, "but we'll leave the traps here. I don't propose to spend the night in the crater after what I've heard."

Yes; the Unknown had discovered part of the secret.

This mountain was in fact nothing more nor less than an extinct volcano. There are many such in Alaska. In most instances the craters are not very strongly marked, but this volcano had evidently been quite recently in eruption.

After descending beyond the peak for a short distance, our party came to a vast circular depression, and passing down into that soon found themselves at the mouth of the crater, a hole perhaps a hundred feet across its sides, lined with rugged rocks, descending to a great depth.

"There you are," said Ned. "Look, Edith. That's where I went down," and Ned pointed to a place a little further along the rift.

"Tremendous!" exclaimed Edith. "I don't believe I shall ever be able to get down there in the world."

"Is the mine down there, Ned?" asked Dick. "Surely there's no use in keeping a fellow any longer in the dark now."

"And I ain't going to," replied Ned; "here goes for it all, Dick. Yes, the mine is down there and I paid fifty thousand dollars for all the right, title and interest to this mountain, and yet the mine can never be worked again."

"Hello! That's a great start!"

"You bet I thought so or I wouldn't have gone into it."

"And this lost million?"

"Was dug out of a lead which opens off the crater away down toward the bottom."

"Yes, yes! Go on and tell us more. I'm beginning to get interested again now."

"Old Jim Prodgers was just on the point of giving up work, having made his pile, when one night a gang of mine wreckers and gold sharks came upon him here in the crater. He knew that his life wasn't worth a rush if they found his gold, so when

he saw them coming, he determined to hide it under a big mass of rock."

"And it is there still? He hasn't been able to get it out?"

"Wrong! Listen and you'll hear. Old Jim pried up the rock with his crowbar, and braced it up with stones, and put the gold bags under it."

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, all this time the mine wreckers were coming down into the crater as fast as they could. Having hidden his gold, old Jim knocked out the props and let the rock drop, when to his surprise, and that of the mine wreckers, too, the rock suddenly disappeared before his eyes, and the result of nearly a year's labor was gone in an instant."

"Where? Where did it go?" cried Dick.

"Where did it go? Why down into another big hole like this to be sure, and there it is now, and there it is likely to stay. Now, Dick, you know the whole story, except that it's my belief those fellows we caught sight of are the same old mine wreckers, led by a notorious Italian tough named Tony Tosti. We may find the gold and we may not, but I'm dead sure we shall hear from them sooner or later, you'll see."

The whole story was told now. Ned's little mystery was a mystery no longer, but the Unknown had started another by disappearing down the crater.

Ned blamed himself for this not a little.

"I wish I hadn't started him off," he said. "There's no telling when I may see him again now."

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," said Edith. "He always does. Look! Look! There he is!"

Far down in the crater, Edith had suddenly caught sight of the Unknown.

He stood on a projecting rock looking up at them.

"He sees us!" cried Dick, waving his hat.

The Unknown pulled off his old plug and waved back.

Then giving one leap off the rock he disappeared down into the depths below.

"If he can do it we surely can," said Dick. "I'm sorry I held back now."

"Then you needn't be," replied Ned, "for I can show you an easier way down than he took."

"You've been down there before?"

"Oh, yes."

"What did you strike?"

"I found Jim Prodgers' old camp all right, and found the place where he lost his million—the hole still there."

"And the million, too?"

"I'll never tell you. I took my chances on that."

"We are with you head on."

Ned knew what he was about when he stated that there was an easier way down into the old crater than the Unknown had chosen.

The detective climbed right down over the face of the rocks, but Ned led the way back from the mouth of the crater for some distance, to a place where

the great convulsion of Nature had opened a narrow rift in the mountain.

By descending here there was a gradual slope into the crater, and just no hard climbing to do at all.

Down they went as easy as you please, finding themselves at last far below the mountain peak.

Nothing was seen of the Unknown, and indeed they had lost the location of the spot where they had seen Ned waving his hat on the rock, when suddenly Ned ducked out of the rift on to a broad level.

Here stood a solitary hut surrounded on all sides by one by rugged rocks.

In front there was a sharp descent still further down into the bowels of the earth.

"This is the place!" exclaimed Young Klondike. "Here's where my lost million went down to China! Will I ever get it up again? Well, we shall see."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### DOWN! DOWN! DOWN!

It proved to be one thing to get down into the crater, and quite another to find the Unknown.

Moreover, Ned was soon able to locate the rock where they had last seen the detective which was just beyond the hut, but so situated that old Jim Prodgers' former residence could not be seen from it.

Below the rock was the last descent into the mountain, a deep, dark hole, out of which some traces of sulphurous vapor came rising, showing that the volcano was not yet entirely extinct.

If the Unknown had gone on down into that hole, there seemed to be very little hope that he would ever come up again.

The boys called again and again—shouted at the top of their lungs—did everything to try to make the detective hear, in fact, but were not able to get any response.

Naturally this was alarming, but the situation remained unchanged up to the time that Ned declared they ought to start back after their belongings left the peak.

It had originally been Ned's intention to go into camp on the peak and not occupy the hut, for the reason that the rocks were very loose and disintegrated all around the sides of the crater, and every now and then great masses would fall off and go hurtling down into the pit below.

Occasionally a piece would land on the level where the hut stood, narrowly running the risk of crushing to powder.

There were many such rocks scattered all over the level and not a few very near the hut.

"We ought not to risk sleeping here," declared Ned, "but now that we've got the Unknown on our hands, after the usual fashion, perhaps we'd better risk it. Edith, what do you say?"

"I ain't a bit afraid," replied Edith. "You know I never was the one to hold back."

"Never. I'm willing to take all chances myself, and you, Dick?"

"With you every time," said Dick. "I won't desert the old Unknown, but I tell you honestly I don't believe we shall ever see him again."

There was no denying that the case looked very bad for the detective, and the thought of what his fate might have been cast a deep gloom over all.

Meanwhile, Young Klondike had completed his story, by showing the place where old Jim Prodgers' million had disappeared.

All this was done before they decided to go back to the peak and get their traps.

Ned led them into the narrow space back of the hut, between which and the side of the crater was a ragged break in the level on which the hut stood.

Edith peered down into its cavernous depths, but could see no sign of the bottom.

"Is that the place?" she asked.

"That's the place, sure," replied Ned. "It answers to old Jim Prodgers' description perfectly. There's a million dollars down at the bottom of that hole."

"And what are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I'm going down after it. That's what I put up my little fifty thousand dollars for."

"It was an awful risk," said Dick. "I don't believe you'll ever see a cent of it again."

"Don't you be so sure. Even if I don't, though, I shall never shed a tear."

"We've got money to burn, it's true, but all the same I don't see much sense in dumping it into a hole in the ground like this."

"Don't you fret; it will come out again all right," said Ned, confidently. "I tell you that man's story is true."

"Has any one ever seen the gold since it went down?"

"Not that I know of."

"You believe there is a cavern under here, and that this hole opens into it?"

"How can I believe anything else? That's plain on the face of it."

"Then what's to hinder these mine wreckers from having found some way into the cavern, or even from going down through this very hole?"

There was nothing of course, and Ned feeling that Dick was entirely right changed the subject and began to talk about the Unknown again.

Soon after that Ned led his companions further along the level and showed them a great mass of loose rock which had tumbled down from the heights above.

"There's your mine," he said. "There's where old Jim Prodgers' lost million came from, and after we find it there's nothing to hinder us from digging it out and getting another."

Dick looked at the rocks dubiously. There did not seem to be much chance for gold digging there.

"Do you really believe it, Ned?" he asked. "I should about as soon think of looking for gold under a New York sidewalk as behind all those rocks."

"That's where you are dead wrong then," said Ned, "for the gold is there. Now, look here, Dick, I've done more studying on mining matters than you have—let me explain. You know that a fissure vein—that is a vein of gold quartz between walls of granite or slate, or any other kind of rock—practically has no bottom."

"I've heard so."

"It is so. The bottom of a fissure vein has never been reached yet in any mine on the face of the earth. The vein may pinch or grow narrower, but you don't come to the end of it, and if you only go down far enough it is sure to widen out again sooner or later; the only question is to get down on the vein."

"Is this a fissure vein?"

"Yes, it is. I've located it on the surface and I know. It is a true fissure vein of the most marked kind. Now you see this vein was disturbed when the crater opened here, and the whole side of it lay exposed at this great depth when old Jim Prodgers first struck it. Of course it wasn't placer digging. The gold did not lie loose in the shape of dust and nuggets as we have been accustomed to work it, but all the same there was dead loads of it there. Prodgers used to hammer it out of the quartz the best way he could and there was enough of it left behind on the dump to make any man rich. He estimated that besides the million he got, fully another million went to waste."

"That's big talk," said Dick, "but how came these rocks here? Tumbled down from above, I suppose?"

"That's what they did. The rocks are constantly falling here in the crater, and on the night these fell Jim Prodgers thought the whole mountain was coming down, so he told me. That's what made him decide to quit, for he had enough, and, of course, he could not hope to remove all these rocks alone. Thunder! Here comes one now!"

Suddenly there was a sharp, cracking sound heard overhead and down the side of the crater a huge mass of rock came tumbling.

It struck the level almost at Young Klondike's feet, and turning over went on down into the pit.

They listened breathlessly, but heard no further sound.

"Good Heavens, has that place no bottom?" exclaimed Dick.

"It's fearfully deep, there's no denying that," replied Ned. "You see now the danger of this place. So far, the hut which Jim Prodgers built has escaped, but there is no telling when a rock will strike it and knock it to smithereens."

It was not a pleasant thing to contemplate, but they could not desert the Unknown.

If no accident had happened to him, they knew that sooner or later he was bound to return to the level, but all were impressed with the horrible fear

that the unfortunate detective had fallen into the bottomless pit.

So Ned and Dick went back up through the rift and brought down their traps, leaving Edith behind the hut to watch for the Unknown.

They had to make three trips before they could get all the things down.

At each return Edith reported everything quiet.

The fear they had felt for their friend now became almost a certainty.

It began to look very much as if they had seen the last of the Unknown.

This made poor Ned unspeakably wretched.

His little joke in keeping up the mystery had turned out most disastrously.

All night long he paced up and down in front of the hut on guard, listening, watching, hoping, but no sign from the detective came.

It was a sad party which sat down to breakfast next morning.

"I suppose we shall have to give Zed up," remarked Dick. "Of course, we should have heard from him by this time if he had been still alive."

Ned turned his head away and made no reply.

"Don't talk about it, Dick," said Edith. "Don't you see how bad Ned feels?"

"It's all my fault," said Young Klondike, brokenly. "It all comes from my ridiculous joking, but what is done is done, and can't be undone, and I say let's be right to work just as though it had never occurred."

"That's agreed," said Dick. "We'll drop the subject forever, but—"

Here Dick's voice broke, and Edith actually started tears, for they all felt dreadfully, being very fond of the Unknown.

But our Klondikers were not the sort to waste time in idle regrets.

As soon as breakfast was over, they went right to work.

"The plan is first to get down into the cavern behind the hut," said Ned, "and I feel sure that it can be done."

"Yes, but how?" asked Dick.

"We'll find out. To begin with we want to see how deep it is. I'm going to let the lantern down."

Thus saying, Ned took his longest rope and tied the lantern onto the end of it, lowering it into the cavern.

The rope ran out its full length of fifty feet, and still the lantern did not touch the bottom.

Looking down into the hole, they could see it swinging there, but its light only showed them empty space.

This made Ned think twice about being let down into the hole.

And yet they knew that this pit was certainly bottomless like the other, for they threw down stones after stone, and each time they could hear the thud as it struck the rocks below.

There was another rope at hand, about thirty feet long, and this was spliced to the first one, and they let the lantern down again, but with the same result.

Still this did not argue that the bottom was far below eighty feet, for the deeper the lantern went the less light it seemed to give.

"I'm going to try it," exclaimed Young Klondike, at last. "Hit or miss I'm going down."

"No, no!" said Edith. "Don't you think of it, Ned."

"Yes, I'm going to do it," persisted Ned, "but I won't run any risk. What we want is more rope, and I believe we can find it in the hut if we look."

There was quite a collection of old mining tools in the loft of the hut which had not been examined as yet.

Ned and Dick now went into the loft and began overhauling them, and there, sure enough, was a good strong rope about a hundred feet in length.

With this the lantern was tied again, and with a singular result.

Before its full length was run out the light suddenly disappeared.

"It's gone out," said Dick.

Ned pulled up, and in a few seconds there was the light again.

"What's that mean?" asked Edith.

"Blest if I understand it," replied Ned, and once more he lowered the lantern.

All in a minute the light vanished again, but when Ned pulled up there was the lantern burning still.

"There must be bottom there and a second hole in it," declared Dick.

"It looks like it," said Ned; "anyhow we can't make anything out of this sort of business. I'm going down to see what it all means."

They knew it was of no use to try to hold Young Klondike back once his mind was made up, so they did not try.

Ned then took a small tree trunk which seemed to have been left over from the building of the hut and placed it over the hole, bracing it firmly with stones.

To this he attached a pulley block, and got the rope working well through it.

Dick and Edith then took one end of the fall thus arranged, and Ned fastened the other under his arms.

"All ready!" he called.

"I'm ready," replied Dick. "For Heaven's sake do be careful, Ned!"

"Don't you fret. I'll take care! Hold hard! Here goes!"

Fearlessly Ned jumped into the hole.

The force of his weight almost pulled Dick and Edith after him, but they held on bravely.

Down went Young Klondike! Down! Down! Down!

## CHAPTER V.

THE UNKNOWN BOBS UP SERENELY AND NED SEES THE GOLD.

It was a startling sensation for Ned Golden.

Never in all his adventures in the Klondike had there been anything equal to it.

Down he went whirling into that strange cavern which had swallowed up old Jim Prodggers' lost million, with the lantern's lurid light reflected against the rocks on all sides.

He realized fully that death must follow the breaking of the rope, or if it should happen to slip through Dick's hands so fast that he could not hold it.

Still Ned kept perfectly cool and watched the rocky sides of the cavern as he flew on. It was the blackest rock he had ever seen, but once he caught the glimmer of gold.

He could see it running down in a long line like a yellow streak.

All in a moment it vanished and Ned went whirling on.

We speak as though this remarkable descent occupied considerable time, but actually it was only a minute or so before Ned saw the bottom beneath him.

At the same glance the mysterious disappearance of the lantern was explained.

The bottom, which Ned saw was only a projecting shelf of rock, occupying about half the space of the cavern.

Beyond this the descent continued. When the lantern was let down it cleared the shelf and passed beyond it, but Young Klondike managed to swing himself inward now, and planted his feet upon the rock.

"Are you all right?" yelled Dick.

"All right!" shouted Ned, and taking the lantern, he kneeled down and lowered it into the dark opening before him.

A diabolical, blood-curdling laugh rang out through the cave.

It came suddenly, echoing and re-echoing far below him.

Then it died away, and all was still.

"Great Scott! What was that?" thought Ned, his hair having a very decided tendency to rise.

Again the laugh was heard—this time nearer.

The echo was tremendous. It was repeated over and over again.

Then it died away and all was still.

Ned ventured to peer down into the hole.

He could see but little, but one glance showed him that here was no abrupt descent like the one from above.

The side of the hole toward him sloped off gradually. Any one could easily walk down, it seemed to Ned, but he could not follow the slope far, for it passed under the rocks and disappeared.

"Of course there is someone down there," thought Ned, and he drew his revolver. "All right. I'm ready for them. By Jove, they are coming now!"

A stone went rolling down the slope; he could hear footsteps; someone was puffing and blowing like a grompus.

Ned's heart gave a great bound, for he thought he recognized that sound as something he had heard many times before.

"Zed! Zed!" he shouted.

"Hello!" came the answer.

"Hooray!" cried Ned. "Dick! Edith! He's here!"

Then a plug hat appeared in the hole and the Unknown bobbed up serenely.

He was as smiling as ever, but so out of breath from the weight of a big bag which he carried on his back that he could scarcely speak.

"Hello, Young Klondike!" he panted. "You're there, are you? Say, you can't tell me anything about lost millions! By the Jumping Jeremiah, your secret is no secret at all, for I know more than you. Here lend me a hand and help me out of this infernal hole."

Ned's joy was so great that he hardly knew what he said or did.

Catching the Unknown's hand in his strong grip, he pulled him up out of the hole and down tumbled the heavy bag at his feet.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the Unknown. "What's the matter with the old detective now? Does he understand his business or don't he? What d'ye say?"

"Ned! Hello! Ned! What's the matter?" Dick's voice was heard shouting down from above.

"Surprise him. Don't give me away," said the detective. "Did you all think I was lost? Oh, no! Ye gods and little fishes, I've had a time of it, though, but trust me for turning right side up with care."

"I'll never worry about you again," laughed Ned. "Never! But it's a shame to keep Dick in suspense. I can't make him hear as well as he can me it seems."

"Shake the rope! He'll know you are all right, then."

Ned did it and Dick stopped calling.

"See that bag?" said the Unknown.

"Well, rather! It's the gold!"

"It's gold, I don't know anything more."

"It's old Jim Prodggers' treasure, of course."

"Not all of it. Only part. Plenty more where that came from, dear boy."

"Open it—let's have a look!" cried Ned, all excitement.

The Unknown gave one of his chuckling laughs, which awoke the echoes again, and untied the string which secured the bag.

It was full of coarse gold, mingled with crushed quartz.

Ned knew that he was looking at a portion of the lost million, and his excitement was so great that he could not help throwing up his hat with a joyful shout.

"Where did you get it?" he cried. "Down below there? How did you get there? Tell me all about it! I'm wild to know!"

"Why," said the Unknown, "I've had a deuce of a time. You see, I made a slip and went down further into the crater than you seem to have gone."

"Into the bottomless pit?"

"Well, now, it is a bottomless pit, and don't you forget it. When I took that tumble I thought I was

a goner sure, but fate wouldn't have it so. I landed on a ledge about twenty feet down, and there I stuck and hung with my head all swimming; a step forward would have sent me whirling to destruction. I couldn't have got up if I'd tried for a week, and so after turning the situation over in my mind for awhile, I determined to go on."

"To go on?"

"Yes."

"But where?"

"Into the rocks."

"Ah! there was an opening there?"

"Yes, there was, and a long, winding tramp it led me, too, but I came out at last into a big cavern, and there I spent the night, because I didn't know what else to do. It was a lucky thing that I happened to have two or three boxes of matches with me, for if I hadn't had them I never should have found the gold."

"It's down there?" asked Ned, pointing to the hole.

"That's what it is. Six bags of it just like this. I found that there was a way up here, and so I took one bag, and was coming up when I heard you hollering. That's all there is to it, Young Klondike. I don't care a rap about hearing your secret now."

They talked further, the Unknown giving additional details of his experiences in the cavern.

Meanwhile, Dick began calling again.

"We've got to satisfy him," said Ned. "Of course he thinks you are lost, and that makes him terribly worried about me."

"Send up the gold. That will pacify him," chuckled the Unknown.

"I'll see if I can make him hear," said Ned. "Dick! Hello, Dick!"

There was no answer.

While Dick's voice carried down well enough, it was evident that Ned's would not carry up.

Ned shook the rope and it was shaken from above in return.

"You try it, Zed," he said. "Your voice will carry better than mine—perhaps you can make him hear."

"Won't do it! I want to surprise them!"

"But what am I to do? I want him to pull up on the rope."

"Holler again! Try!"

"Dick! Dick!" yelled Ned, at the top of his lungs. This effort did the business.

"Hello!" called Dick.

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes!"

"Pull up when I shake the rope again—can you hear that?"

"Yes; all right!"

Ned then tied the bag securely to the rope and shook it again.

Dick immediately pulled up.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it gives a fellow cold chills to see it go," said the Unknown.

"I suppose you thought you were booked to remain below ground all your life?" laughed Ned.

"That's what I did before I heard you hollering. Listen! Dick has got the gold now."

"Hooray! Hooray!" Dick was heard shouting above.

"Let down the rope!" yelled Ned.

"Have you got any more stuff like this?" called Dick.

"Lots more! Let down the rope!"

Down the rope came tumbling.

"Tie it under my arms, dear boy," said the detective. "Now for my surprise."

When the Unknown was secure he gave the rope a terrible yank.

It took all the strength Dick and Edith could muster to pull him up.

You can imagine their amazement when instead of Ned they saw the Unknown's plug hat come up out of the hole.

"Hello! Here comes the crazy detective bobbing up serenely," he cried. "Hooray for our side! We've got the lost million! Hooray!"

Edith and Dick could hardly find words to express their joy.

The Unknown told a little of his story, and the rope was let down again for Ned.

Dick ran it out to the full length and shouted to Young Klondike to take hold.

There was no answer.

The rope hung limply in the fall. Ned did not seem to respond.

"What's the matter?" yelled the Unknown in his fog-horn voice, which he knew well enough Ned must hear.

Still there was no answer.

They called and called and yet it was just the same.

Where was Ned?

What was the matter down in the hole?

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MINE WRECKERS SHOW THAT THEY STILL LIVE.

JUST as Dick was beginning to grow seriously alarmed, the rope was violently shaken.

"Hello, up there! Hello!" Ned's voice could be heard faintly shouting.

The Unknown could not but notice how different the sound was from when they heard Dick's voice down in the hole.

"Young Klondike is all right!" he cried. "Bully for him. Wait a moment! What's he saying? I want to hear."

"Come down! Come down!"

Those were the words which were heard far down in the hole.

"We'll be with you in a moment!" shouted the Unknown. "Do you want us both?"

"You and Dick! Let Edith stay where she is!"

"Not much I won't," cried Edith. "If there's any possible way of arranging it, I'm going down with the rest."

"Why, it's easy arranged, of course," said the Unknown. "Here, give us that other rope."

"I'd like to know what you are going to do," said Dick.

"Show you in a minute, just as soon as I find out how big a hurry Ned is in. Hey, Young Klondike! Hey! Hello, down there in the hole!"

"Hello!" came the faint response.

"Any hurry?"

"Not a bit!"

"We'll be with you in a minute! Edith is coming, too!"

"She can't! How can we get up again if there ain't someone to work the rope!"

"I'll fix that. What's the row?"

"There's someone below."

"The deuce you say! Who is it?"

"Don't know."

"Seen 'em?"

"No; only hear them. Don't stay talking, we want to go for the balance of the gold."

"All right. We'll be with you in a moment."

The Unknown then spliced the short rope on to the end of the long one and had a double fall of equal length.

To the end he tied a knot so that it could not run through the pulley block, testing it in every way.

"That will bear me all right," he said, at last. "Now then, Edith, you first."

"Who goes last?" asked Edith, holding back.

"I do, of course."

"But how? Who is going to let you down?"

"I'm going to let myself down hand over hand."

"You can never do it!"

"Oh, yes, I can—can't I, Dick?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Zed can do most anything when he tries."

"I can do it—never you fear," said the Unknown, confidently.

"But suppose the knot slips through the block?"

"It won't; there's no chance of it."

"The thing that's worrying me," said Dick, "is how the first one is going to get back again if we all go down."

"Don't let it fret you. I can go down hand over hand, and I can come up hand over hand, too."

"If I was only sure of it."

"You may be, then. I can do it!"

"What did you splice the rope for?"

"So that I wouldn't have to do it. With a double fall, one of us can pull Ned up, and he can pull the rest up."

"But where's your double fall when the rope will be all pulled out to the knot when you go down?"

"Plain enough. I shall back the rope through the pulley and make the double fall all right."

"That's enough, I won't say another word,"

laughed Dick. "The fact is you are equal to any emergency. Edith, it is perfectly safe to go."

And so they all went down the hole, the Unknown dropping hand over hand as proposed.

Dick and Edith looked around the narrow cave curiously, for it was all new to them.

"What's the row?" demanded the detective, as soon as he had explained to Ned how he meant to work the rope, for this was the first question Young Klondike asked.

"I heard somebody pounding down below there," replied Ned. "The noise has stopped now."

"You say you went down to see what it meant?" "Yes."

"Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing. I only went a little way. The noise stopped then."

"Heard it since?"

"Yes, two or three times. There it goes again now."

They listened. A dull pounding could be distinctly heard down in the shaft.

"There's someone there, sure," declared the detective. "Come, I don't like this for a cent, seeing that the balance of the lost million is down there in the cave."

"We'd better all go down at once. By the way, what did you do with the bag of gold?"

"Put it in the loft of the hut," said Dick. "It ought to be safe enough there."

"Oh, I suppose it had. I'm bothered about it, although I wish we had our gold and were out of this place."

"We'll make a move," said the detective. "Don't you worry, Young Klondike. It will come out all right."

"Who's worrying! Come on!" exclaimed Ned, seizing the lantern.

"Let me go first," said the detective, taking the lantern from him. "I know the way and you don't." The Unknown then led the way down into the hole.

It was easy going and they soon found themselves in the big cavern which the detective had described.

It was a vast affair, so large that they could not see the end of it.

Beyond the place where they came down the roof rose to an immense height.

By this time the pounding had ceased.

The Unknown waved the lantern about, but they were not able to see any one.

"I can't imagine what it means," he said. "There seems to be no one here, and I can't believe any one has been here since I've been gone."

"Where's the gold?" demanded Dick.

"Ah, ha! You are there, are you?" chuckled the detective. "Golden & Luckey haven't got millions enough—they must have more, eh? Well, you shall have your way. I'll take you right to the gold."

There was a big broken mass of rock lying near the bottom of the slope.

"That's the rock that came down through the hole

when old Jim Prodggers lost his million," said the detective, confidently. "There it is, dear friends."

"And the gold?" asked Ned.

"Look here!"

The detective led the way around behind the rock. There lay the bags of gold.

They were all intact but one, which had broken open, its contents being spilled out over the floor of the cave.

"By thunder, we've found it!" cried Ned. "Who says I didn't do well to give fifty thousand dollars for a million? Has anybody got anything to say now?"

"Nobody," said the detective. "It was a big scheme. Only thing is can we get the blame stuff to a place of safety? Hello! There goes that infernal pounding again!"

They could distinctly hear it. The sound seemed to come from a point at some little distance along the wall; a series of dull thuds against the rock.

"This must be investigated," said the detective. "As for me, I've got a theory about it right now."

He picked up the lantern and hurried forward.

"How about the gold?" asked Ned. "Shall we leave it where it is?"

"Can you suggest a safer place?"

"No; I don't know as I can."

"Then let it stop there. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I want to know what that infernal hammering means!"

They reached the place in a moment.

The pounding still continued.

Our Klondikers stood watching, and could see the rocks tremble under the blows.

"There's someone in behind there, sure," said Ned. "There's more than two ways into this mountain."

"But the third one don't go the whole distance, and they are trying to make it," added the Unknown. "That's what's the matter with the dog."

"Wait," said Ned. "Don't say a word. Let's just watch and see what will come of all this."

They remained watching for as much as ten minutes, during all which time the pounding continued.

Then it suddenly ceased, and they could hear voices talking in behind the rocks.

The explanation was plain enough. There was another cave behind the rocks, and several persons were in it trying to break through.

"They'll make a go of it sooner or later," said the detective, in a whisper, for they all saw the necessity of lowering their voices now. "See how the rock has cracked and crumbled. They are taking a rest, but just wait till they start up again. This time they will break through."

"Get the shooting iron ready," said Dick, "we may have serious work to do here."

The rifles had been brought with them down into the cave and were now carefully examined.

Edith and Dick took up their stations on one side of the opening and Ned and the detective on the other.

Here they watched and waited until at last the unding began again.

For a few moments the blows came thick and fast. It was soon evident that the rock was yielding.

"They'll be through in a second," said the detective; "better put the light out before they get onto us. We may have to stand on the defensive at any moment now."

The lantern was then extinguished and, as it proved, not too soon.

All at once the wall fell in with a tremendous crash, the broken stone scattering about in every direction.

"Hooray! We've done it at last!" a voice shouted. "Where's Tony? Call him up!"

Somebody whistled then, and a light flashed.

It shot straight into the cave, and the watchers were able to see several faces peering in through a great ragged opening in the wall.

"Phew!" thought Ned. "Those are the same fellows we saw in the hut!"

He recognized them fully, especially one man with a big blonde beard.

"If these ain't the mine wreckers, I don't know who they are," Ned pondered, but still as the figures of the break made no move, he made none, and did not give the signal to fire previously arranged.

"Come on, Tony! Come on!" shouted the bearded man.

"I'm a-coming," answered a voice in the distance. "Did you break a through?"

"That's what we have. There's a thundering big hole here."

"He! He! Is dere, dough. Vell, data de place! A gold million go down dere. He! He! Vell we can get him now."

"Will you?" thought Ned. "We'll see about that."

He scraped his foot on the rock, which was the signal agreed upon for a quick attack.

Instantly four rifles rang out, echoing and re-echoing through the cave.

"Jerusalem crickets!" yelled the bearded man. "I'm shot!"

Then there was a scramble and the light went out.

As he stood there in the darkness, Ned could hear the mine wreckers running away from the rocks.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BACK AT THE OLD HUT.

"FOLLOW 'em up!" cried the detective. "Don't let the grass grow under our feet! Follow 'em right up, wally!"

At another time Young Klondike might have hesitated about giving chase to such a notorious gang of desperadoes as he knew the mine wreckers to be.

But not now.

There was a million at stake.

Ned was determined to secure that million at all hazards.

So they ran on through the interior cave firing as they went.

The cave soon narrowed down until it became a mere tunnel.

Here they caught sight of the mine wreckers who were lighting their way by means of a reflecting lantern.

"Fire!" shouted the Unknown. "Sweep the scoundrels off the earth!"

Everyone let fly, but it seemed to have no other effect than to send the men on all the faster.

In a moment they passed out of sight, and our Klondikers found themselves in complete darkness.

Of course they had to stop and light the lanterns, and by that time even the footsteps of the retreating enemy ceased to be heard.

"We made them dust, that's sure," said Dick, "but it seems to me we want to find out what became of them if we can."

"We can do it. All we've got to do is to push ahead," said the detective; "come on."

"Do you think any of them were hit?" asked Edith.

"One fellow, said he was," replied Ned. "Such gentlemen seldom lie."

"But he ran right on."

"Perhaps he got it in the arm," said Dick. "I don't think he would have hollered out the way he did for nothing."

"That's right," added the Unknown. "He was hit, fast enough, but probably it was only a flesh wound. Here's the turn they took right ahead of us. Now, we shall see where they went."

They passed around the bend in the tunnel, and to their surprise broad daylight burst upon them.

In a moment they came out into the open.

At their feet the valley of Gold Creek lay spread out before them. Looking down the rugged slope they could see the mine wreckers making their way over the rocks as fast as they could go.

"Draw back," said the Unknown. "We don't want to let them see us. My idea is that they fancy they ran against a much stronger force than they actually did."

"Yet if they are the men we saw in the hut, they must have known we came up on the mountain," remarked Dick.

"My theory is," said Ned, "that they were not armed—that they had no idea we were on the same lay as themselves. In fact, I don't believe they know who we are."

"Ain't that the hut down there?" exclaimed Edith, suddenly, and she pointed far down the valley along the windings of the creek.

"Surely it is," answered Ned. "Of course it's the hut. We've come out on the end of the mountain. You see, those passages go winding around."

"Best thing we can do is to get back to the crater," said Ned. "We've nothing to stay here for now. Let's go for our million and get out."

This was the signal for a start.

They returned through the caves, and carried the bags up to the bottom of the hole.

Here the Unknown showed that he was as good as his word.

He managed to force the knotted end of the rope down through the pulley, working the rope up and up, until at last the knot came down into his hand.

"That's the talk!" he exclaimed. "Now, then, who'll go up first?"

"Edith," said Ned, promptly. "The old fall may break, and in that case I shall want her to be safe."

"Do you think I'd want to stay up there alone?" replied Edith. "I'd a great deal rather be down here with you, and in any case I could get out the other way."

"I'll go, then," said Ned, "and then you can follow. Dick and the Unknown can load on the gold."

"Pleasant occupation!" chuckled the detective. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, when gold comes this way I wouldn't object to keep loading it on all night."

The plan was carried out. Soon all the party were at the hut in the crater with old Jim Prodggers' lost million lying on the floor at their feet.

"Business, business!" cried the detective. "Look at it! Look at it! Unto him that hath shall be given! Was ever a million made easier than this?"

But they had not secured it yet by any means.

The return journey lay before them and its dangers were like the detective's name—unknown.

Talking matters over it was decided to start back after dark, as they did not care to pass the mine wrecker's hut in the daylight.

A hard task lay before them to get the gold up out of the crater, and it was a dangerous one, too, climbing up over the rocks loaded down with those heavy bags.

It took three trips to get them all up, and by the time they had accomplished it, and were safe on the top of the mountain, they were glad to rest for a full hour before starting down to their old camp.

Then came another tug. Three trips down and three up the mountain again was no joke.

Night was close upon them before the gold was all safe aboard the boats.

As for the mining tools, they were left behind. To attempt to reopen the buried mine was something not to be thought of for a moment.

Rich it might be, but Golden & Luckey owned others just as good, which could be worked without the difficulties and dangers which went along with this.

"We're all right up to the present time," cried Young Klondike, as Dick started the naphtha engine going. "All aboard for Dawson City! Off we go."

And Ned took up his banjo, which always went along on these trips, and began to play.

The launch plowed its way down the creek, and

everything went as smooth as glass until they came pretty close to the mine wrecker's hut.

"We want to look out for ourselves now," said the detective. "Drive ahead at top speed, Dick. Once we are past this blessed old ranch we are safe."

It seemed as if fate was against them.

Just as they came abreast of the hut, the Unknown who was doing the steering, managed to run the launch against a rock.

"Look out! Look out!" shouted Dick, but it was too late.

The heavily loaded launch struck the rock with terrific force, tearing a great ragged hole in her bow. She began to sink instantly.

Ned had just time to throw his arms around Edith and lift her ashore when the launch went down.

Dick and the Unknown had to swim for it, and so did Young Klondike himself.

The tow-line was broken, and the boat with its load of tools and provisions drifted on.

"Look out for Edith!" shouted Ned, and he started boldly out through the icy water, secured the boat and brought it ashore.

"Well, by the Jumping Jeremiah, this is a tough job!" said the Unknown ruefully, as wet and dripping they all stood on the bank before the hut. "Someone please kick me? This is all my fault. I'm responsible for the whole shooting match! The gold is your lost million down at the bottom of Gold Creek, Young Klondike. Too bad! Too bad!"

"It is your fault," said Dick, angrily. "A black cat could do better than you've done—yes!"

The Unknown pulled off his old plug hat, and turning it over, struck himself on the top of the head with the crown three or four times.

"That's right! Lay it on! Lay it on thick!" cried the detective. "Shall I jump into the creek and drown myself? Shall I beat my stupid brains out against the side of the hut? What shall I do, boys? Only you and I'll do it! That's the sort of hair-pin I am!"

"Nonsense! What's the use talking," said the detective. "Here we are tied up in the most unfortunate predicament possible. What are we going to do about it? Talking ain't the least use in crying over spilled milk."

"Milk is one thing and a million of gold is another," said Young Klondike.

"But we know where it is—that's one comfort."

"So did the old woman who dropped her silver pot down the well."

"We can get the gold up all right if we are given the chance."

"Well put, but how about the mine wrecker? Will they give us the chance?"

"We'll find that out later. There's no use in worrying. Let's go up to the hut and take possession and make ourselves comfortable for the night."

"Look here," said Dick, "that's a risk I don't like running. We've got our tent, suppose we put it here and put in the night in sight of our drow million. Wouldn't that be a great deal better?"

inclined to think it would."

Ned pointed up to the sky. It had become overcast; there was every appearance of rain, and rain in Alaska is pretty apt to mean a downpour.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" cried the Unknown, "there's going to be a big storm. I hadn't noticed it before. It won't do to have Edith out here in the rain."

"Don't any of you think of me," said Edith. "I can stand whatever the rest of you can."

"It's the hut, I guess," said Ned, after a moment's thought. Anyhow, we'll go up and see how things are. If there is going to be a big storm I'm no more anxious to sleep in the tent than any one else, and besides, what would it amount to? We might just as well be in the hut as out here, in case the mine wreckers decide to make an attack."

"That's sound sense," said the Unknown. "The hut it is. We'll go now."

Although they thus reassured themselves, none of our party felt very pleasantly about going into the hut.

They had saved their rifles by throwing them ashore, and they started up the slope well armed, but feeling decidedly nervous.

Young Klondike fully expected to see the red-shirted mine wreckers appear at the windows again, and it is safe to say that the others felt just the same.

But nothing of the sort occurred.

As before, the hut seemed to be entirely deserted.

They went in, and Ned searched the place carefully, looking in every hole and corner of the loft, but finding nothing to arouse his suspicions in the least degree.

Fortunately the provisions were all safe, and as it soon began to rain they were brought up to the hut.

Anticipating the storm the boys and the Unknown brought in great armfuls of dry wood, and a roaring fire was built on the hearth.

Edith then went to work cooking supper. It seemed to be a foregone conclusion that they would have to remain in the hut all night, so they determined to make themselves as comfortable as they could.

By nine o'clock it was pouring in torrents.

It was anything but pleasant. Aside from the dangers of the hut there was the gold at the bottom of the creek to be thought of.

Of course the creek was bound to rise and there was always the chance of the launch shifting its position. Ned asked the Unknown what he thought.

"I don't think it will move much," said the detective. "The weight is very great. That's why the launch got the knock it did; besides it's wedged in there against the rock."

They could see the wreck distinctly enough. As far as Ned could determine, there had been no change of position since it went down.

"We'll take it easy," he said. "What's to be is to be, and we can't help it! There seems to be a fatality attending old Jim Prodggers' lost million. Do

you know, Zed, that I begin to feel that we shall never succeed in getting it to Dawson City. I don't know whether I'm right or not, but somehow I can't get the idea out of my head."

"If we don't, I shall start for the North Pole straight," replied the detective, "for as I have said once or twice before, it is all my fault."

They returned to the hut, and for the next two hours made themselves as comfortable as possible.

Not another word was said about the lost million, which was certainly a most sensible way of handling a very disagreeable matter.

Ned played the banjo, Edith sang, and the Unknown told his usual extravagant stories.

Meanwhile, the rain was coming down harder than ever. It was a perfect deluge by eleven o'clock when Edith retired to the loft and Dick and the Unknown stretched themselves out by the fire.

Ned had agreed to keep watch for the first part of the night, for the detective declared that he had not slept a wink the night before.

It was dreary work sitting there alone listening to the Unknown's heavy snores.

Toward midnight, Young Klondike grew so sleepy that he almost lost himself several times.

He got up, opened the door, and looked out.

A wild dash of rain struck his face and drove him back.

As he looked off through the gloom he could see that the creek was rising.

It had already overspread its banks, and a little further rise would bring it up to the level on which the hut stood.

"There's going to be trouble here," thought Ned. "I can't help feeling it. A little more of this and we won't get away from here in a week."

Ned shut the door and sat down by the fire again.

He had not the least intention of going to sleep, but just the same he did, and next he knew he awoke with a start to find his head on the table, and when he looked at his watch he found also that it was after one o'clock.

Ned sprang up and rubbed his eyes.

"Confound it! I'm a great one to keep watch!" he exclaimed. "Good Heavens! I hope no one woke up and caught me at this. Wonder how the storm is getting on outside?"

He hurried to the door and threw it open.

An exclamation of surprise escaped him as he looked out.

The creek had risen to within a few feet of the doorstep.

As far as the eye could reach it was all water.

The boat, which had been dragged up over the bank with great labor, was no longer to be seen.

Ned gave a cry of dismay, and all in the same instant he heard in the distance a cry of another kind.

"Help! Help!" came faintly over the waste of water. "If you've got a boat for Heaven's sake come out and get me! I shall drown."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE MAN ON THE RAFT.

"HELLO! Hello!" shouted Ned at the top of his lungs!

"Hello! Here I am coming down the creek!" came the answer.

"What's the row, Young Klondike?" cried the Unknown, starting up, and up sprang Dick, and then both were treated to the cry again.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we are stalled here in the creek for fair!" exclaimed the Unknown. "This is a pretty kettle of fish."

"Who do you suppose it is that's out there, Ned?" demanded Dick.

"Don't ask me! What are we going to do?"

"Help him if we can. Where's our boat?"

"Gone, I suppose. I can see nothing of it."

"By gracious, we ought to have taken it inside the hut! Who ever would have supposed the water was going to rise like this?"

"Too late now," exclaimed the detective. "No doubt the old tub is serenely floating down the Yukon now. It's a lucky thing we brought in the grub, and such of our traps as we did."

"There goes that fellow again!" cried Ned, as once more the man's voice calling made itself heard.

The sound was nearer now.

It was the same old cry for help, but still they could see nothing.

Heard as it was over the waste of water, it sounded almost ghostly. At all events it gave Ned a cold shiver as he listened to it.

He went in and got the lantern, and stood waving it at the door.

"Shall I call up Edith?" asked Dick.

"Why, there's no use as things are at present," said the detective. "Let her sleep. Ned, have you got your night glass? I'd like to have a look off there."

"If it ain't in that old grip of mine, I left it in the locker of the boat," replied Ned. "I really don't remember whether I took it out or not."

"May I look?"

"Certainly, or I will; but the thing ain't locked."

"I'll look," said the Unknown, and sure enough he found the glass in the grip.

Levelling it across the water he gazed long and earnestly, but declared that he could see nothing.

The fact is, it needed some light even for a night glass, and there was next to none then.

The cry, meanwhile, had ceased to be heard, and Ned began to think the poor fellow had been drowned and said as much, when all at once the shout came again.

"Hello! Hello! Is it you, Tony Tosti?" the voice called through the gloom.

"A friend of the mine wreckers' gang, by gracious!" exclaimed the Unknown, and then all of a sudden they caught sight of a raft which came whirling

around a mass of rocks further up the line of the creek.

There was a man crouching on the raft, which was bobbing up and down, now shimmering along on top of the water, now half under it, and then again entirely submerged.

The man seemed to be holding on for dear life. As near as they could make out in that dim light, he was some miner—at least, he looked like one in his red shirt, big boots and slouch hat.

"Steer this way!" shouted Ned. "Pull off one of the boards and steer for the light."

"I don't care how tough he is," he added; "we can't stand by and see him drown."

The man managed to rip off one of the boards of which the raft was constructed, and by its aid began steering for the hut.

"You ain't Tony Tosti," he called out, as he approached. "Heavens! I know you now! It's Young Klondike! What on earth brought you here?"

"Jim Gannon as I'm a sinner!" the detective cried.

And indeed it was a man whom they all knew well, an honest fellow who at one time had worked for Golden & Luckey up on El Dorado Creek.

"Work her along Jim! Work her along! You'll be sure to make it. We are all here."

And Gannon did actually manage to work his raft to the door.

Ned and Dick were all ready to lend him a helping hand, and he came staggering into their midst wet and dripping, while the Unknown caught hold of the raft and made it fast to the hut.

"Pull off your clothes, man, and rub yourself down with a dry towel before you get your death," cried the detective.

But the poor miner just keeled over and fainted. It only needed one glance to see that he was far gone with exposure, and if one could judge by his pinched face with hunger as well.

"Why, this poor cuss is about used up," exclaimed the detective. "We'll have to give him a drink of whisky and pull off his clothes for him, or he'll die on our hands."

It took ten minutes of good hard work before they got the man back to his senses.

Then he sat crouching by the fire, wrapped in a blanket, while his clothes were hung up to dry.

"What in the world brings you here, Jim?" asked Young Klondike, as soon as the poor fellow was able to speak.

"Why, boss, I've been mining up on Cherry Creek the last three months," was the reply, "and mighty hard luck we've had there, and that's right."

"Haven't you struck anything! I've heard it said that the Cherry Creek claims were panning out pretty well."

"They did pan out well as far as that went. There was nothing to hinder a man making a fair return for a day's work down on Cherry Creek any time since we struck it, but we've been twice cleaned out by the mine wreckers who hang around Gold Creek. Tony

his gang, and as hard a set as is to be found on Klondike, and last night they came again and made a clean sweep."

"Last night! Do you mean to-night. We saw him this afternoon."

"No, I don't mean to-night. I mean last night as I say. Boss, they killed six of my company, and drove them what was left into the mountains. I tried to cross over to Gold Creek and got separated from the rest and that was the way I came to be here."

"And Gannon went on to tell how he had built the raft out of boards belonging to a shaft house at a dead mine which Ned and his friends remembered having passed far up on Gold Creek."

"The country is all under water there," he added. "It is going to be the biggest flood on record, but boss, what are you fellows doing here? Don't you know that this is Tony Tosti's hold out? Sure as I am living he's going to come back here with his whole gang sooner or later. What are you going to do?"

"Right," replied Ned. "Yes, we know it, but we are weather-bound here, too."

"It's a blame bad place to be weather-bound in. Let me tell you, but say, haven't you got some food here? I'm almost starved."

"They fed their visitor then, and sat talking till day-

"Not a word was said about the sunken million. The next day the boys gave the boys a word of caution about that. It's all very well for Gannon to talk as he does," Ned said, privately, "but you'll recollect, Ned, that he is always a pretty tough citizen himself."

"I've been thinking," replied Ned.

"How do you figure it out?"

"I don't figure it out. One thing is sure, though, I expected to find Tony Tosti here. Perhaps he tells the truth about the wrecked mines on Cherry Creek. Perhaps he doesn't—we'll see."

"Meanwhile, Edith had come down and was not at all surprised to learn of the changes the night had brought about."

"Breakfast was started going, and while they were waiting for it the boys boarded Gannon's raft and floated out upon the swollen creek."

"The water had fallen a little, but it was still up to the door of the hut."

"The boat had vanished, but when they succeeded in floating the raft into position over where the launch had been sunk, to their great joy they were able to see that it was still there."

"The storm was all over now and the icy water of Gold Creek was as clear as a bell."

"You could distinctly see the launch still lodged against the rock and there were the bags of gold lying on the bottom. The great weight had kept the launch down. Everything was there undisturbed."

"Very gracious, I could easily get one of those bags," Ned said. "I've a great mind to do it, too."

Dick objected. "I wouldn't try," he said. "You'll get the cramp sure."

"Not a bit of danger. The only thing that worries me is whether you will be able to hold the raft in position if I make the dive."

"Guess I could do that all right, but what good would it do to get one bag? If we can't get all I say let all remain as they are."

But Ned was bent on trying, so Dick was persuaded, as he usually was.

Young Klondike then undressed himself and prepared for his dive.

"Gee! The water is as cold as ice," said Dick, dipping his fingers in.

"It's cold, and don't you forget it," replied Ned, "but I don't care a rap for that. Here goes."

Throwing up his hands Ned made the dive.

As he disappeared under the water, Edith suddenly came to the door and shouted:

"Oh, Dick! Come! Come, quick!"

Then she turned and disappeared inside.

Dick was thrown into a terrible excitement. He found himself between two fires, so to speak.

Evidently there was trouble in the hut—Edith's whole manner showed it, but on the other hand he couldn't desert Ned, whom he could see moving about over the launch.

"Dick! Dick!" shouted Edith again, this time from inside the hut.

"Coming! Coming!" cried Dick and then all in an instant two shots rang out with muffled sound.

Dick was wild! He did not know which way to turn.

Then to his immense relief Ned came flying up to the surface.

"I couldn't get it!" he gasped. "I couldn't rise with the gold."

"Get aboard! Get aboard!" cried Dick. "There's trouble in the hut."

"Trouble in the hut? What do you mean?"

"Edith wants us! There's been firing."

"Get over there as quick as ever you can!" gasped Ned, pulling on his trousers. "It's that man Gannon! I was afraid of it! He's no good and never was! I wish to gracious we'd left him on the raft!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### NED, SINGLE-HANDED, ATTACKS THE GANG.

NED felt seriously alarmed.

As for Dick, he was half wild to think of what might have happened to Edith. Then there was the Unknown! Why had not he put in an appearance through it all?"

As Dick paddled for the hut he told just what had happened.

All was as still as Sunday now. They called again and again to Edith, but got no response.

When they reached the door Ned sprang off the raft, and was through it in an instant, leaving Dick to make fast. He was standing in the middle of the floor alone when Dick sprang through the door.

"They are gone! They are all gone!" he cried. "Oh, Dick, what does it mean?"

"Don't ask me!" groaned Dick. "Oh, Ned, something terrible has happened! You're right when you say it's Gannon's work."

"But I don't understand it. I can't make head or tail of it. Where can they have gone to with the water all around the hut?"

"Tell me how those fellows came in that night, and then I'll tell you how the Unknown and Edith went out, for as sure as you live, Ned, it was the same way."

"Hark!" cried Ned. "I hear someone moving about under here. I didn't know there was a cellar under the hut."

"I don't believe it now! It's a cave, and don't you forget it. There is someone coming—look—look!"

The wall of the hut was boarded up on each side of the big fire-place, and as Dick spoke the boards on the right side began to tremble and shake.

All at once a sliding panel moved aside, and Edith's face appeared in the opening.

"I can't find him!" she exclaimed. "I can't find him. I've been as far as I dare to go."

"Edith, what has happened?" cried Ned, running forward and helping her out of the hole.

"It's the Unknown. He went in here after that man Gannon," replied Edith. "Boys, I was up in the loft when I heard the Unknown suddenly give a shout. I don't know just what happened, for when I came hurrying down the ladder I saw this panel open. I could hear Zed shouting: call Ned and Dick! call 'em quick! I did call, but you wouldn't come and then hearing shots, I couldn't stand it any longer, and went through the hole myself, but it hasn't amounted to much, for I haven't found Zed."

"Well, this does beat everything!" exclaimed Ned. "It just seems as though we never would get through our troubles. What did you find down there, Edith? Tell me quick before I start down myself."

"Why, there's a cave," replied Edith; "that is, if you can call it a cave, for it is really not much more than a passage in under the rocks. It's as dark as midnight and terribly rough. I'm sure I can't tell you where it leads to. I followed it as far as I dared."

"And didn't you hear anything more of the Unknown?" demanded Dick.

"Not a thing. I couldn't hear a sound, not even a footstep, but the passage went straight on."

"Gannon is in with the Tosti gang, that's all there is about it," declared Ned. "He tried to give the Unknown the slip but the old man was too sharp for him. He'll turn up all right. You'll see."

"This accounts for the appearance of those men in the hut that night," said Dick. "We know what all that meant now."

"We must go on the hunt," said Ned. "Let's go here. These hills are all volcanic in their formation and are just riddled with tunnels and caves. Let's stop and think a minute. Here we are up against the side of a hill. On the other side is the valley, Cherry Creek; more than likely this passage runs right through to Cherry Creek Valley, same as the case up on the mountain. Of course, the mine wreckers know all these passages, and there you are. They built the hut here because they knew that they could get in and out secretly, and that's what it means."

It was so clear that Ned's reasoning was correct that the question seemed hardly worth discussing any further.

The real question was what to do.

If it had been any one else but the Unknown they would have instantly started after him, but they knew the detective's habits so well that they could not feel the concern about him they would have felt about another.

Then there was the million dollars in gold to be considered. Very naturally they wanted to keep a watch on it.

"We can't all leave here with the gold at the bottom of the creek, that's sure," said Ned. "Dick, you stay with Edith, and keep an eye out for the gold. I'll take my rifle and go down into the cave, and see if I can find the Unknown."

At first Dick and Edith were rather unwilling to agree to this, but Ned persisted, and taking his rifle he passed through the secret panel, and descending the ladder, soon found himself in the cave.

It was perfectly dark here, but as Ned had taken his lantern with him he had no difficulty in making his way along.

The cave was much like the one leading out of the old crater, a mere tunnel through the rock.

Its general direction was westward. Ned saw that it must lead out to the Cherry Creek valley provided it passed through the mountain as he assumed it did. He hurried on seeing nothing and hearing nothing that indicated the presence of the Unknown, until at last after a walk of at least twenty minutes he caught a glimpse of daylight ahead.

"I'm coming out," thought Ned. "I shall be out of the mountain in a minute, sure."

He pushed on, and presently did come out on the side of the hill overlooking Cherry Creek.

Here he paused for a few minutes and looked around.

There were three mines far down the valley.

He could see the shaft houses distinctly; there were men moving about. Ned put his glass to use and was able to see that one party was panning gold on the bank of the creek.

At the next mine they seemed to be hoisting; Ned could see great buckets of sand and gravel go tumbling down the dumps.

It did not look at all as though the mine wreckers

cleaned out the Cherry Creek people, as Jim Gannon had said.

As Ned stood there looking, he was seized with a sudden idea.

"I believe I'll go down there and get some of those people to help us," he determined. "If I don't know them at least they must have heard of me, and, of course, they will be willing to make a common cause with us against this gang."

He had no sooner conceived the idea than he started to carry it out.

Shouldering his rifle he hurried down the hill and covered about half the distance to the nearest point, when suddenly he saw a man's head pop up from behind a mass of loose rock right ahead.

Young Klondike was as quick as lightning.

As the head came up he dropped and lay flat on the ground.

The man was looking down toward the mines taking everything with a glass.

After a moment he turned his glass and looked up the hill, but Ned was now not to be seen.

"That's one of them," thought Young Klondike. "More than likely the gang is hiding there."

He watched, and in a moment the head disappeared. Then it came up again and another came with it, and another and another—there were four heads above the rocks now.

The glass was passed around, and all took a look down the creek.

Soon after that the four men came out into full view.

They were big, rough, red-shirted fellows, the kind Young Klondike had seen before.

After another keen look around they went sneaking down the mountain toward the mines.

As soon as they were well out of sight, Ned was on the move, too.

He did not venture to stand upright, but slinging his rifle over his back went creeping along on all fours until he was within a few feet of the rocks, from behind which the men had appeared.

As he drew near he could hear voices talking among the rocks.

Ned took off his hat, raised himself cautiously to a level with the top of the rocks and looked down.

It was just as he had expected. There was a deep hollow behind the rocks, and some of the mine wreckers were there.

Ned counted six, and one of them was Jim Gannon, who appeared to be on perfectly good terms with the others.

Then as Ned looked a little further along his breath came fast, for there was the Unknown a prisoner, bound hand and foot.

He was lying on his back with his plug hat standing on the rocks nearby, and he looked about as uncomfortable as it was possible for a man to look.

"By Jove, they've got him!" thought Ned. "For the Unknown has let himself be nipped! This

won't do! I've got to get him out of there if it takes a leg!"

It was easy enough to say this, but how was it to be done?

Had Young Klondike courage enough to attack this gang single-handed and alone?

Ned had courage enough for any move, however bold, but the only question was would the move pay. About that he felt rather doubtful. He wanted time to think.

Just then the Unknown, who had evidently grown tired of lying there, broke out in his usual style.

"Say, boys!" he exclaimed, "what's the use of keeping me tied up in this style? You've got me, and I'm willing to admit it. I couldn't get away if I tried. What in thunder is the use of making me any more uncomfortable than you have to? Say?"

"Well, I don't know as there's any use," drawled Gannon. "Got you—of course we've got you, Mr. What's-er-name. I always get what I go after. I went for you and I got you—that's right!"

"It will be right after you untie my feet and let me sit up," said the Unknown. "Gannon, you're a bully boy and no mistake! Just think of it! When I saw you sneaking down through that secret panel I followed you and fired at you."

"Yes, and blame near shot me, too."

"Which is what I ought to have done, my dear fellow. Didn't you humbug me even then into thinking that you were working for Young Klondike's interests? Didn't I follow you as meek as a spring lamb right into the arms of your friends here? By the Jumping Jeremiah, I didn't suppose it was possible for me to be such a fool!"

Gannon laughed at this and all hands joined in.

They began to poke fun at the detective, but did not make much out of it, for he was good for them every time.

"Come, come!" he said at last, "let me up, boys. I tell you it can't do you a bit of harm. My legs are as stiff as a couple of ramrods—yes, that's right."

"Of course it's right," chuckled Gannon. "That's what we are out for to make you feel as comfortable as possible—over the left. Look here, boss. I'm going to make a proposition to you."

"All right. I am open to any proposition. Fire away."

"You and Young Klondike were up on the mountain, weren't you?"

"That's a question, and not a proposition."

"Answer my questions first and the proposition will come later."

"Why, certainly we were," replied the Unknown, promptly. "I'll answer any question you've a mind to put."

"It will pay you to do it. You went up there to look for the million in gold old Jim Prodgers lost—ain't that right?"

"That's right. Sure it's right."

"Did you find it?"

"Find the million?"

"Yes, of course; you know what I mean?"

"Certainly we found gold up there, but it wasn't old Jim Prodggers' million. Oh, no!"

"What do you mean?"

"It was two million."

"Two! Come now, come now!"

"Oh, that's right, and don't you forget it. When Young Klondike sets out to do a thing he always does it in big style. What's a million to him, say?"

"He's got enough of them, and that's right," growled Gannon, "but that's neither here nor there. What we want to know is where the gold is now!"

"Oh, I'll tell you, if you'll let me sit up," replied the detective. "Of course, I'll tell you. I know when I'm well off every time."

"You'll tell us now."

"No, no! A bargain is a bargain."

"Who made a bargain with you? Tell it right out."

"Didn't you say you were going to let me sit up if I'd tell?"

"No, I didn't say anything of the sort, but I will though, if you'll tell me all I want to know."

"Spit out your questions. How can I answer them before they are asked?"

"Not very well, perhaps. You lost that gold by the flood—ain't it so?"

The Unknown at this burst out with one of his horse laughs.

"So? Of course it ain't so," he cried. "Certainly it ain't so. What put that idea into your head?"

"Come now, come now! I know Young Klondike's ways well enough."

"You may think you do, but you don't know all of them, or you wouldn't have no such idea as that. We never brought the million down the mountain—oh, no."

"What! What!" cried Gannon excitedly. "Do you mean to tell me that you left the gold up on the mountain?"

"Why, sure."

"Go on, now!"

"Wish I could. Ye gods and little fishes, you'd see how fast I'd go, if I was able."

"Where is the gold if it didn't go down to the bottom of the creek in your launch?"

"Why, it's up on the mountain still. We left it at the bottom of the crater, and 'cause why? Because we couldn't get it out."

"At the bottom of the crater? Rats, rubbish! You don't mean that."

"No, I don't mean at the very bottom—of course we didn't get there."

"Then what do you mean? Are you jollying us or what?"

"Well, now, come, Gannon. You ain't green enough to think I'm feeling so very jolly," drawled the Unknown, in his comical way. "I mean the cave where you fellers broke in—that's what I mean. There's a hole there forty or fifty feet deep, and the gold's at the bottom of it. Oh, yes; that's right."

Now, all this the Unknown said with an air of truth that was so convincing, that Gannon and the mine wreckers seemed to believe it at last.

He went into the most minute details, and seemed to find no difficulty in adding lie to lie, but it did him little good, for they did not untie his legs, and he was still kept in his uncomfortable position on the rocks.

"Now, looker here," said Gannon, at last. "I don't know whether you are lying or not, and I don't care a gosh hang—no. If you know where that gold is you've got to take us to the place and show it, and if you don't, Young Klondike will, for we are going to capture you all. Oh, yes! That's what! You can't escape us none."

"No, I don't suppose we can," said the Unknown. "I'm quite prepared for that. When are you going up to the hut to do the job?"

"Want to know?"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, yes! I wouldn't have asked if I hadn't wanted to know."

"Well, then, it will be in about half an hour, just as soon as Tony Tosti gets back from Cherry Creek. You see, I don't mind telling you that we mean to clean out them mines to-night—the whole bunch of them. Then we are going to skip off for St. Michael's and quit the country, but we want that there lost million, or two million, or whatever it really amounts to. Yes, sir! It's going along with the rest of our haul."

"That all?" demanded the Unknown. "Is that really all you want? Isn't there anything more?"

"All except Young Klondike—we mean to take him along, too."

"Come! That's consoling. You don't mean to kill him, then?"

"Kill a goose who can lay us such a big golden egg as he? Not much! We'll let the rest of you go and take him along. A million will buy him. We'll let you know where to send the cash."

The Unknown was about to make some reply, when chancing to raise his eyes, to his utter amazement, he saw Ned standing at the beginning of the slope which led down into the hole.

The backs of the mine wreckers were turned and they could not see.

Then Young Klondike did as bold a thing as was ever done by boy or man.

Suddenly raising his rifle he began firing.

"Come on, boys!" he shouted. "Come on! Clear 'em out!"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Ned's Winchester talked in tremendous style as he came rushing down the slope.

"Here they come! Here they come!" bawled the Unknown. "Fly and save yourselves! Young Klondike has got twenty men behind him up on the rocks!"

It was the very boldness of the boy's act that did it.

The mine wreckers were panic-stricken in an instant.

Two dropped wounded and the rest ran down the rocks as though Satan himself was at their heels, while Ned sprang into the hollow still banging away.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BIG FIGHT ON CHERRY CREEK.

"JUMP, Zed! Run for your life! They'll be right back in two shakes!"

That's what Young Klondike said to the Unknown when with a few quick strokes of his knife he set him free.

"You can just bet your sweet life I'll jump like a rabbit!" chuckled the detective. "I knew you'd come, dear boy, but I didn't think you could do it alone."

The detective sprang to his feet, and following Ned closely, ran up upon the rocks.

In a moment the mine wreckers saw them and knew how thoroughly they had been fooled.

But it was too late to do anything then.

Ned and the detective had a good start.

What was more, Ned had kept in mind the opening of the tunnel, and in a few moments they were inside.

A few shots from the mine wreckers flew after them so they passed out of sight.

It was a useless effort. Ned and the Unknown only laughed at it.

As they ran on the detective explained what little of the situation he did not already know from the conversation he had overheard.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we must go for them fellows!" he cried. "They're a tough gang, and don't you forget it! I'd walk from here to Juneau to get square with that Gannon—yes, I would!"

"We can do it, and we must!" replied Ned. "I tell you what, we'll leave the lost million where it is, and start right out to help those unfortunate fellows on Cherry Creek."

It was a noble resolve, and one quite characteristic of Young Klondike, for Ned always had more thought for others than himself.

The passage of the tunnel was made in short time, and there was Dick at the foot of the ladder ready to meet them.

He shouted to Edith that they were coming, and she came running down with her usual warm welcome. It was a joyful time all around.

Back in the hut again, they fastened the panel so that it could not be opened, unless the mine wreckers knocked the whole hut over, and then sat down to discuss the situation quietly.

"We've got to get the best of those fellows somehow," declared Ned, "and I say let's drop everything else and go right at it. Zed, do you seriously think they will wait until night before they make their attack?"

"Yes, I do. From what I heard Tony Tosti say, I think there is no doubt about it."

"Anything to hinder us from running down Gold Creek in the boat, and so along the Yukon to Cherry Creek, and then up the mines?"

"It will be pretty heavy pulling with all our traps."

"We'll leave the most of them behind. Only take provisions enough to keep us from starving."

"Then we might do it."

"How far do you call it?"

"Hard to say; about twelve miles, perhaps."

"That is five miles down Gold Creek, two miles along the Yukon and five miles up Cherry Creek to the mines."

"Something like that, I can't say positively, but that's about the idea."

"We'll try it," said Edith. "I'm sure we can make it work, and as for the lost million, even if we never see it again we've got enough without it, I'm sure."

It was determined to lose no time, but to start at once.

Edith went to work to prepare a good dinner, however, for all hands were hungry, and Ned declared that they must eat before they thought of making a start.

While these preparations were being made a good sharp watch was kept on the secret panel, you may be sure.

Once Ned thought he heard someone moving about behind it, but if there really was anybody he did not stay long, for when Young Klondike came to listen more attentively he could hear nothing at all.

Shortly after dinner they started down the creek.

The water had fallen somewhat and as they passed over the place where the launch sunk they could distinctly see it below.

"Hope to goodness they don't take a notion to come snooping about here!" exclaimed the Unknown. "They can see the bags as plain as day."

"We've got to take our chances on that," replied Ned. "Anyhow, they can't get at them till the water falls and we shall be back with the Cherry Creek miners to help us long before that."

"Do you mean to bring them back?" asked Edith.

"Yes, if we can't knock the gang out any other way, we'll all come back and have a second fight here."

But this was counting chickens before they were hatched, for who could tell what was to happen at Cherry Creek.

The run down Gold Creek was accomplished without much difficulty.

Little rowing was necessary, for the creek ran like a mill race, and all they had to do was to keep the boat in the middle of the channel to go flying along.

Soon they entered the Yukon, and then the real labor of the journey began.

To pull a small boat with four people in it up against the Yukon, is no easy task.

The boys tugged and strained at the oars, but seemed to make but little headway.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is hard lines!"

said the Unknown, at last. "Let up, Young Klondike. I'll take a hand."

"Oh, it ain't necessary," replied Ned. "We are working along well enough."

"We'll get there in time," said Dick. "We are coming along."

"Coming? So's Christmas! You'd better let me take an oar."

"No, sir! I won't do anything of the sort," said Ned, "at least not until I'm played out."

"Same with me," added Dick. "You just sit still and take it easy."

"Well, then, if you won't let the crazy old detective take anything from you, will you take something from him?"

"And what?" asked Ned.

"A bit of advice."

"Did I ever refuse advice from you?"

"Never that I know of. Will you take it now?"

"Yes, if you have it handy. How am I to take it? In pound lots or by the ton?"

"In four words, Young Klondike."

"Speak those four words."

"Keep nearer the shore."

"What good will that do?"

"Current ain't so strong."

"Yes, but the woods are mighty thick and come right down to the water's edge. We'll be dead certain to run into some snag or other."

"All right. Have it your own way, then."

"No, I shan't. I mean to have it yours. We'll pull in nearer the shore."

They were soon under the trees and found the Unknown's prediction fully verified.

It was far easier pulling.

Every now and then they would strike an eddy, or back current, which sent them flying forward at a great rate.

But even when they had no such good luck, they went along far easier than they had done in the middle of the stream.

But every situation has its trials, and this brought its own a few moments later, and very startling they were at the time.

It was when they caught one of the eddies—perhaps the strongest one they had encountered yet.

Ned and Dick, to help matters along, gave a few rigorous strokes, and away they went flying with such speed that they were thrown against a projecting point of land with such force that the Unknown could not steer past it.

The bow of the boat was actually thrown up on the shelving beach, and before the boys could make a move or even exclaim, six Indians sprang out of the thicket with loud yells, and began brandishing their tomahawks.

Edith flung up her rifle and Ned and Dick shipped their oars and made a grab for theirs.

Edith fired, taking one of the Indians in the arm and sending him reeling back among the bushes,

whereupon the others immediately took to their heels and ran away.

The boys sprang out of the boat and pounced upon the wounded savage who was trying to crawl away among the bushes.

The poor wretch in his broken English immediately began to plead for his life.

"No kill! No kill!" he cried. "Red Dog be white boy's slave. Oh, yes. No kill!"

"Get up," said Ned, sternly. "We don't want to kill you even if you did try to kill us."

The Indian instead of obeying crouched at Ned's feet.

"Red Dog make mistake," he said. "Heap big mistake. All Indians make mistake. Tink you bad white men. Tony Tosti's men—oh, yes."

"Hello!" cried the Unknown, "so you know Tony Tosti's gang?"

"Yes, yes! Red Dog know. Him heap bad man. Oh, yes!"

"There's a chance to work a point here," whispered the detective. "Get up, Red Dog. If you've got a bullet in your shoulder I'll take it out."

At first Red Dog could not believe in the genuineness of their good intentions, but as soon as he was convinced that it was kindly meant he readily submitted himself to the Unknown.

The detective was considerable of a surgeon, and after examining the wound declared that if Red Dog could stand it, he could easily take the bullet out.

"Take him out then," said the Indian. "Take him out now."

And he stood up and let the Unknown dig his pocket knife into the quivering flesh without making a sound.

After a few moments the Unknown succeeded in extracting the bullet.

The Indian seemed very grateful, and when the detective bound up the wounded shoulder he took off a handsome bearskin robe which he wore and offered it to him.

"No, no, keep it, keep it," said the detective. "It was all a mistake. We don't want to hurt good Indians. Look, Red Dog, we are hunting for scalps, but not Indian scalps. The men we are after are Tony Tosti and his gang."

"Me help! Me get plenty of Indians to help!" declared Red Dog, emphatically. "Tony Tosti heap bad man!"

"Will your friends fight for us?" asked Ned.

Red Dog declared that they would, and when Ned asked him where they were and how soon he could get them, he assured him that they were close by, and that he could have them there in a few moments' time.

Then Red Dog went on to tell in his broken way, that he was chief of a small band of Indians, and how the mine wreckers had attacked the village, killing several men.

They were out for revenge, it seemed, and after some consultation the boys decided that they could

not do better than to take up with these dangerous allies.

Red Dog then retired into the forest and soon returned with his entire band, some twenty in number.

Some carried rifles, but for the most part they were armed with bows and arrows.

Ned received them warmly and there was a general shaking of hands and all sorts of promises on both sides.

"Tell your men, Red Dog, that if they help me and will come to Dawson I will give them good canoes, and blankets, and rifles and everything they want."

This was the sort of talk that takes the Indians every time.

"It's a big thing if we can only handle them," said the detective, "but how we are ever going to get them up Cherry Creek is more than I can see."

"Perhaps they have canoes," said Ned.

"Perhaps they haven't. If they had them, I reckon they would have said something about it before this."

But the Unknown was entirely mistaken, for right then Red Dog asked where they were going, and if all came out right.

"Up Cherry Creek," replied Ned.

"Tony Tosti not up Cherry Creek!" replied Red Dog, emphatically.

"But he will be to-night."

"Does white boy know?"

"Yes, I know; I'm sure of it."

"Then Red Dog will go with him. White boy go in boat; Red Dog go in him canoes."

"Have you got canoes?" Ned demanded.

Red Dog's answer was that they had plenty, and he led the way across the point, and there, concealed in a little cove, were canoes enough to easily carry the entire band.

"This is immense!" cried the detective. "We've got force enough to lick the stuffing out of Tony Tosti's gang now."

"That's what we want," said Edith. "It's a big stroke of luck. I felt nervous about it before, but I feel sure now that we shall be able to carry our plans out to success."

Certainly it looked so. The Indians were very friendly. They told Ned that it was only a mile further to the mouth of Cherry Creek, and Red Dog also declared that the twelve miners there had been often threatened by the mine wreckers, but so far had been able to hold them at bay.

Then he went on to tell how many mines had been broken up by the gang, and many other interesting things about them, all of which Ned was glad to know.

Then they all embarked and went on up Cherry Creek.

As they neared the mines, they were soon discovered.

The miners, some fifteen in number, ran to arms and put themselves in readiness to attack.

"They are afraid of us," said Ned, "but they'll change their tune when they find out who we are."

He jumped up in the boat and waved both hands above his head.

"Hello, there! Hello!" he shouted. "Don't be afraid! We are friends!"

But the miners seemed rather distrustful until the canoes came nearer. Then they set up a wild shout.

"It's Young Klondike! It's Young Klondike! Hooray! Hooray!"

"Hello there, Bart Brown! Is that you!" yelled the Unknown, for the leader of the Cherry Creek party was none other than one of the Golden & Luckey's old workmen.

Of course our party was received with open arms, and when Ned explained the situation, Bart Brown and all hands thanked them heartily for coming.

"We were afraid when we saw the Indians," cried Brown, "but we are more afraid of the Tosti gang. They've attacked us several times, and we've been robbed of as much as a hundred thousand dollars in dust by them altogether. Tosti has often threatened to clean us out and take the mines away from us altogether, and I believe that this is the time he means to try to carry out his plan."

"Let him," replied Ned. "If we don't give them a great old shaking up my name ain't Golden. Let him try it if he dares."

It was determined that the Indians should go into hiding in a deep gully just back of the mines.

Red Dog agreed to this plan readily enough, and the canoes were pulled up on shore out of sight.

Then Ned and Dick inspected the diggings on Cherry Creek.

He found the mines fairly rich, but being worked by very primitive methods.

"You could make a fortune out of them, boss," said Brown, "but we have no proper tools, and what's more we can't get them in Dawson now, not even for money."

"I can fit you out," said Ned, "and I'll do it, too. I laid in a big stock last fall. They are up at my place on El Dorado Creek. I'll ship you down a complete outfit just as soon as I can get back."

"We shall be very thankful to you," said Brown, "and we'll pay the full market price."

"No, you won't!" replied Ned, heartily. "All we want is what they cost us. Golden & Luckey are always ready to help a brother miner out."

"Golden & Luckey are a credit to the Klondike," said Brown. "Things would go better if there were more of your sort."

"They'll go better on Cherry Creek after we get rid of Tony Tosti's gang," said Ned, "and that's what we are going to do to-day."

Then Brown inquired what brought the boys down in that section of the country.

Ned replied vaguely that they were out prospecting, but very properly avoided all mention of the lost million.

The afternoon wore away and evening came, but as yet they had neither seen nor heard anything of the mine wreckers.

"They won't show up till nine o'clock, and you needn't expect them," said the Unknown; "but I haven't the least doubt that you'll see them then."

At half-past eight Ned had an interview with Red Dog, and the Indian chief renewed his promise to stand by them.

He seemed very grateful for what had been done for him, and Ned felt no fear of the band turning against them when the time came.

Before nine sentinels were placed at each of the mines to keep a sharp lookout in case of an attack, but the rest of the miners concentrated in one of the shaft houses where Ned, Dick, the Unknown and Edith were, too.

"We'll be ready for them whenever they show up," declared Ned.

They did not have long to wait after that.

Within twenty minutes one of the sentinels at the next shaft house suddenly raised a red handkerchief on the end of his rifle.

This was the signal that the mine wreckers had been seen and the whole party was thrown on the alert at once.

Ned immediately sent a messenger to inform Red Dog.

As yet he could see nothing himself, but within five minutes he perceived several armed men creeping down the opposite hill, which had been the scene of their adventures the night before.

Remember it was still light. The Arctic day is a long one. The sun had not yet set.

"They are coming," said the detective. "Give me your glass, Young Klondike. I want to see if I can recognize any of those men."

Ned handed over his glass, and after a long look the detective declared that Tony Tosti was in the lead.

"There are thirty of them altogether," he added, and Ned smiled as he thought what short work they would be able to make of the gang.

It was decided to let them come close to the shaft houses.

As no one showed themselves the mine wreckers grew bolder.

They soon came out into plain sight, and crossing the creek began to ascend the hill on which the mines stood.

"Come out of there, Brown! Come out and surrender!" shouted Tony Tosti.

This was what Ned had been waiting for.

"Fire! Let them have it!" cried Young Klondike, and this time it was he who ran the red handkerchief up.

Tony Tosti took the signal for a challenge perhaps, for he and his men began blazing away, and came dashing up the hill.

They did not get far.

Instantly every rifle from the shaft house spoke.

With a wild war-whoop, Red Dog and his band came rushing up out of the hollow, and firing as they advanced, dashed down the hill.

"Surrender, Tony Tosti! You can't escape us!" shouted Ned, recklessly running out of the hut.

He opened fire on the leader of the mine wreckers. The gang halted.

Tony Tosti drew a bead and fired.

"Heavens! I'm shot!" cried Young Klondike, staggering back, and the blood came streaming down all over his face, while Edith, with a cry of terror, ran round and caught him in her arms.

## CHAPTER XI.

### RAISING THE GOLD.

"NED! Ned! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, Dick! Ned is killed!"

Poor Edith was almost beside herself then.

"Nonsense! There's nothing the matter with me at all!" cried Ned, pulling himself away. "It's just a scalp wound. Let 'em have it, boys! Let 'em have it!" and the brave fellow fired and started off down the hill.

It was hardly necessary. The mine wreckers had by this time caught sight of the Indians, and began to comprehend how the case stood.

For an instant they wavered and then turned and ran for their lives.

But not all, by any means.

As many as seven fell wounded, but the rest made their escape across the creek, plunged in among the rocks and disappeared.

The Indians then took up the chase, but our Klondikers held back.

Ned had arranged all this beforehand.

He was most anxious to return to the hut to look after the lost million, so the programme was that Red Dog should follow up the gang.

By ten o'clock the Indians not having returned and nothing more having been seen of the mine wreckers, our friends bade good-by to the Cherry Creek miners, and started to return to Gold Creek.

They met with no adventure on the way, and by sunset—that was nearly eleven o'clock—came in sight of the mine wreckers' hut.

The water had gone down very considerably. Gold Creek had now returned almost to its natural limits.

There was no sign of any one in or about the hut as they pulled the boat up on shore.

"I don't believe any one has been here," declared Ned. "It looks exactly as we left it."

"You can't tell," replied the Unknown. "You stop here and I'll sneak up and see."

"No, no!" cried Dick. "Let's all keep together."

"That's what," added Ned. "There must be no separation now."

So they all started for the hut together, but a sharp lookout was maintained, you may be very sure.

It proved to be entirely unnecessary, for the hut was deserted.

Moreover, no one had been there as far as they could make out. The secret panel was nailed up just as they had left it when they went away.

"I guess we are safe," said Ned. "We gave those fellows such a shaking up that it ain't likely they'll bother us any more."

"What's to be done with the wounded men we left at the mines?" asked Edith. "I never thought to acquire before."

"Oh, Brown will take care of them till they have recovered," replied Ned, "and I've agreed to send some of the Northwest police down here just as soon as we get back to Dawson."

"And the rest?"

"They are in the hands of Red Dog."

Edith shuddered.

She knew only too well what that meant.

It was very unlikely that the Indian chief would show the mine wreckers much mercy if they fell into his hands.

The first question now was supper and the next the lost million.

Now was the time to recover the gold, and Ned was determined to work at it all night if necessary.

While Edith was preparing the meal Young Klondike pulled out on the creek and stopped over the place where the wreck of the launch lay.

It was not easy to see down into the water even with the lantern to aid him.

Ned tried in every way, but was not able to determine whether the gold was still there or not.

"We shall have to wait for daylight," he thought, and then he started back again for the hut.

Daylight was due between twelve and one, for the summer sun in the Klondike country does not remain long away.

Dick, Edith and the Unknown, indulged in a little sleep, but Ned kept on the watch, and awakened his companions as soon as the sun showed itself above the hills.

He and Dick then took the boat and pulled right out to the place where the launch lay.

Now they could see it plain enough.

It lay wedged against a rock under about six feet of water.

The bags of gold were all as they had been left, seemingly not one missing.

"Hooray for our side!" shouted Dick. "It's all right! Jim Prodders' lost million will soon be a found million again."

"We won't holler till we are out of the woods," replied Ned.

"You don't anticipate any trouble, do you?"

"No, no! I can stand on the bottom and pass the bags up. It's only a little over my head now."

It proved to be just as easy a task as Young Klondike had anticipated.

He stripped off his clothes and plunged boldly into the creek.

Planting both feet firmly on the launch, Ned was able to raise the bags without any difficulty.

The water was icy cold, to be sure, but he cared nothing for that.

Bag after bag was passed up to Dick, and stored away in the boat.

The weight caused it to sink so in the water that Dick became seriously alarmed.

"Say, Ned!" he exclaimed, when Young Klondike came up for breath, "this old tub is never going to hold it all—never in the wide world!"

"Who says so?" laughed Ned. "It will work all right."

"And carry us, too! No, sir!"

"I say it will! Don't you fret; the boat is stronger than you think for."

Down went Ned again, and up came another bag of gold in a moment.

Each additional bag brought the boat down lower in the water.

Ned soon saw that Dick was right.

"I don't believe it will carry all," he said, dubiously, wading out on shore. "What in thunder are we going to do about it, Dick?"

"Don't ask me, because I'm blest if I can tell you," replied Dick. "You see the condition of things now."

"I see. It's bad."

"Of course we can't hope to carry any of our traps."

"Never expected to do that anyhow, but I did think it would take the gold."

"Well, it won't."

"I see it won't now. What's to be done? I don't know unless we build a raft."

"And take it in tow?"

"Yes."

"We might do that."

"It's risky. If we happen to run into a rock or anything, away goes the gold, and, besides, there's danger of the raft upsetting if we don't balance it just right."

But it was perfectly evident that they would be forced to try it.

In fact, the boat was already so overloaded, that Ned felt it safer for Dick to pull ashore before the remainder of the bags were added to the pile.

Dick worked the boat ashore as carefully as he could, and with Ned's help the gold was unloaded.

The Unknown now joined them, but Edith remained in the hut asleep, as the boys had not considered it necessary to disturb her.

"I suppose you are going to build a raft," said the detective, taking in the situation at a glance.

"That's what we've got to do," replied Ned.

"There's no help for it, as you can see for yourself."

"Well, then, I'll go right at it," said the detective. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've got to do something to pay for my passage. It seems to me as though I'd been nothing but a bother and a nuisance this trip."

"Don't say that. Who found the lost million?" replied Ned.

"Well, you can charge it to me if you want to, but

hasn't that been a nuisance? Never mind. I'll make up for it. Ye gods and little fishes, I can work."

So the Unknown pulled off his coat, went up to the hut, got an ax and began cutting down young cedar trees which grew plentifully along the banks of Gold Creek.

He soon had enough felled to build the raft, and by that time Ned and Dick were through with their work.

The last bag of gold was now safe on shore.

Ned then dressed himself and Edith was called.

"Wake up! Wake up!" shouted Young Klondike, under the trap door leading up to the loft. "The lost is found! Old Jim Prodggers' million is ours again!"

"Three cheers!" cried Edith. "I'll be with you in a moment, boys! Anything been seen of the enemy since I went to sleep?"

Ned replied in the negative and left Edith to dress.

With the help of Dick and the Unknown he bound together the small cedar trunks, having fortunately, a good supply of stout cord which was heavy enough for the purpose.

By the time Edith had breakfast ready the raft was completed and everything in shape to load the gold on.

Breakfast was served in the hut where there was a table and plenty of dishes.

Of course they discussed the mine wreckers as they ate.

"It would be a bad job if they should happen to show up now," the Unknown was just remarking when all at once they heard a curious sound behind the secret panel which brought everybody up standing with a start.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, there's someone there now!" breathed the Unknown.

Ned ran to the panel, put his ear against it, and listened.

"That's what there is," he said. "There is certainly someone there."

"Can you hear them talking?" whispered Edith. "It seems to me that I can."

"I'm sure I hear voices. I can't make out what they are saying, though."

"We must move quick," declared Dick. "They'll try to break through, sure. If we could only get a start before they do it."

"Run out and begin loading up, you and Edith," said Ned. "We'll keep a watch here."

"The gold first?" asked Dick.

"The gold first every time, of course. Hustle now! Don't let grass grow under your feet."

They had not been gone two minutes before matters came to a crisis.

After a brief silence, during which Ned allowed himself to indulge in the hope that whoever was behind the panel had gone away, a sudden violent blow was struck against it on the other side.

"There you are! They're at it!" breathed Ned, seizing his rifle.

Again it came.

Someone was beating against the panel for all the were worth, blow after blow.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAST OF THE LOST MILLION.

BANG! Bang! Bang!

The attack on the secret panel kept right up. If it had not been made of good cedar wood, it must have yielded long ago.

With their rifles ready for instant action, Ned and the Unknown stood grimly watching, ready for whatever might occur.

"Aren't they most ready?" cried Ned, impatiently. Then he called to Dick through the door.

"All ready now!" came the answer. "The last bag is on, but how about our traps?"

"Let everything go! We'll bring along the provisions; the rest of the things can stay where they are."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Thick and fast came the blows on the panel. It did seem as if the wood must yield.

Ned seized the provision hampers, and the Unknown took the ax.

They ran out of the hut and joined Dick and Edith in the boat.

They were not an instant too soon, either, for all in the same moment there was a loud crash inside the hut.

"They're in! By gracious, they're in!" cried Ned.

"That's what!" echoed the Unknown. "Same old gang, too! There's Tony Tosti! Take that, you sucker! Ha! I knocked his hat off, anyway! Now, by the Jumping Jeremiah, come on and I'll knock off your head."

Suddenly the chief of the mine wreckers appeared in the doorway with a crowd of men behind him.

The Unknown's shot did actually take his hat off, and then the fighting began again.

"Stopa dere! Stopa! Stopa right away quick or we kill!" Tosti cried, and the shots came thick and fast.

"Duck! Keep down out of the way!" shouted the Unknown.

He fired again and so did Edith, but Ned and Dick were rowing, and, of course, could not work their rifles too.

The Unknown's shot flew wide of the mark this time, but Edith's took Tony Tosti in the right shoulder, and he dropped his rifle with a yell.

"Pull! Pull!" cried the Unknown, as the mine wreckers faltered, gathering around their wounded companion.

And pull Ned and Dick did for all they were worth.

In a few moments they were out of range and making good time down the creek.

Now for the time being they were comparatively

safe, for the bluffs along the bank of the creek were so steep and rocky that it was next to impossible for the mine wreckers to follow them on shore.

The boys pulled in between these bluffs and were soon out of the way of the bullets, and the Yukon lay right ahead.

"We're safe! Hooray! We are safe!" shouted the Unknown.

And they all thought the detective right until a few moments later when all at once two boats appeared behind them coming rapidly in pursuit.

"Well, I vow!" cried the detective. "There they are! By the Jumping Jeremiah, we don't get rid of them as easy as we thought! The fight is on again, boys! They are after us! We can't slip them now, but where in Sam Hill did they get the boats?"

Puzzling enough it seemed, but it would have been as plain as it was puzzling if they had only known that the two boats had lain concealed among the bushes all the time they were in the hut.

Young Klondike's party had never observed them, but as they belonged to the mine wreckers it is not at all strange that they should be able to put their fingers on them as they did.

Ned at once saw that matters were likely to take a serious turn.

In some way the mine wreckers had given Red Dog's band the slip, and here they were close at their heels, breathing threats of vengeance and sending occasional shots spinning toward the raft and boat.

"We've got to shoot to kill, that's all there is about it," said the detective, grimly. "The whole gang is not there, but they outnumber us two to one, and something definite has got to be done."

Edith looked grave.

There was no better shot in all Alaska than this brave girl, but shooting to kill was something she could not bear to think of—in short, it was entirely out of Edith's line.

"That's what the situation is," replied Ned. "If we can only once make the Yukon, we shall be all right. Come, Edith, what do you say?"

"I won't shoot to kill, but I'll shoot to stop them," said Edith. "If I can fix them so they can't handle the oars, will that do?"

"We don't ask for anything more," declared the detective, "because— Oh, ye gods and little fishes, that's enough!"

Edith sighted the canoes over her Winchester.

"I can do it with the six in the first boat," she said.

"Now?" demanded Ned. "Are we in range?"

"They are steadily gaining on us—we will be in range inside of a minute and a half."

"Don't say a word! Leave it all to Edith," said the detective. "She don't promise more than she can perform."

Suddenly one of the mine wreckers in the first boat reup his rifle and fired.

The shot struck the water within a few feet of them, but it fell just short of the boat.

"If his rifle can carry that far mine can carry the balance of the way," said Edith, coolly. "How far are we now from the mouth of the creek, Ned?"

"About three hundred yards. It's right around that bend."

"That's enough! Hello! another shot! We're in range now all right enough. Here goes!"

The shot struck the water right alongside the boat.

It was plain that the mine wreckers were not good marksmen, but nevertheless, no one could doubt that they meant to shoot to kill.

"Now, then, the Winchester talks," said Edith, coolly.

Bang!

She fired.

One of the oarsmen on the right gave a yell and dropped his oar. They could see that he had been struck in the shoulder from the way his arm fell to his side.

Bang!

Another shot.

An oarsman on the left dropped his oar with another yell, handling himself in precisely the same way.

"Three cheers for our Edith!" shouted the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, you've nipped two of them and no killing yet."

Bang!

Then it was another and then another.

There was now only one man left in the boat able to help himself. He fired as the others had done and equally without avail, for Edith nipped him, too, and the boat floated helplessly down the creek, the men yelling and shouting to their friends in the other boat.

"Ye gods and little fishes! You've fixed them all, Edith!" cried the Unknown, "and not a man killed. Well upon my word, my dear, you are a wonderful shot."

"Will you tackle the other boat now?" demanded Dick.

"I will as soon as it comes in range; certainly," replied Ned.

"How much does it lack?"

"Mind your rowing, Dick! We're coming into the Yukon now! First thing you know you'll run against that rock!"

The rock in question was right across the mouth of the creek, and Ned spoke too late.

Dick took a wild stroke, and the mischief was done.

The boat grazed its edge, and was thrown violently off, but the raft struck full against it; the heavy bags of gold shifted, and before one could have said Jack Robinson, it tilted up and over it went, the bags sliding off as easy as you please, splashing into the water one after the other, until the last one had disappeared.

Fatal blunder! It upset more than the raft—more than all, Young Klondike's plans, for the boat went over, too, dragged down by the weight of the raft, and everybody found themselves in the water.

It was a hot time—we should say a cold time—all around.

To scramble out on the rock was easy enough, but there they were almost at the mercy of the enemy, for only Edith managed to hold on to her rifle, and the second boat of mine wreckers was bearing down upon them full speed.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we're in the soup now!" cried the Unknown, "and the lost million is lost for fair. Fire, Edith! Fire! We'll defend ourselves until the last!"

And Edith did fire, and so did the mine wreckers. The shots came whirling around the rock, and there is no telling what the end might have been, but just then the whole affair was changed by the sudden appearance of a small fleet of canoes around the point which marked the junction of Gold Creek with the Yukon.

It was Red Dog and his Indians.

Young Klondike gave a shout, pointing to the mine wreckers.

"Help us, Red Dog! Help us!" he cried.

There was no need of the appeal. Red Dog had seen the situation, and that was exactly what he had come for.

The instant they were in range the Indians opened fire with arrows and rifles, and the mine wreckers were driven back up the creek.

Then Young Klondike's party was rescued from the rock and the Indians rowed them up to Dawson City, where Ned rewarded Red Dog and the entire band in a manner which could not have been more liberal if old Jim Prodggers' million had been saved instead of lost.

Next day the Northwest police started down for Gold Creek to drive the mine wreckers from the neighborhood, but they only found the wounded prisoners at the Cherry Creek diggings.

Tony Tosti and his gang had disappeared, and were never heard of again.

Not a bit disheartened by the loss of his million, Young Klondike immediately started on another money-making scheme, which brought with it a train of interesting adventures.

This affair will be found fully detailed in the next number of this series, entitled "YOUNG KLONDIKE'S GOLD SYNDICATE; OR, BREAKING THE BROKERS OF DAWSON CITY."

[THE END.]

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